

JUNE

THE

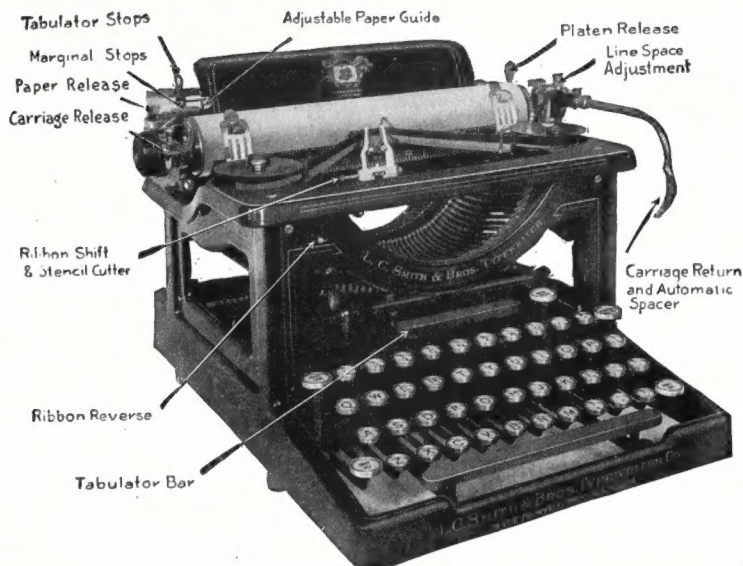
10 CTS.

ARGOSY



*Ships of
by Strife*
Captain A.E. Dingle

BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL
COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE



I want, through this advertisement, to establish as friendly business relations with you as I possibly can. I want you to realize also, that it is my earnest effort and intention to give you full honest value for every dollar that you spend with me. This is the only way I can succeed. The publisher of this magazine will vouch for my square dealings during the four years and more my advertising has appeared.

I am building up my business on the foundation of good value and square dealings. I am saving thousands of satisfied customers thousands of dollars, by supplying, perfect—late style—visible writing—typewriters, at remarkably low prices.

All my transactions are handled throughout by personal correspondence. I assure you every courtesy and consideration, in your dealings with me. Your order will have my prompt, careful, personal attention. I will be glad to do business with you.

Harry A. Smith

TYPEWRITER SENSATION

Free TRIAL—Use As You Pay

Send me only \$2.50 a month until the low total price of \$48.80 is paid, and the machine is yours

This is absolutely the most generous typewriter offer ever made. Do not rent a machine when you can pay \$2.50 a month and own one. Think of it—Buying a \$100.00 machine for \$48.80. Cash price, \$45.45. Never before has anything like this been attempted.

Standard Visible L. C. Smith Model Number 2

Perfect machines, Standard Size, Keyboard of Standard Universal arrangement writing 84 characters—universally used in teaching the touch system. The entire line of writing

H. A. SMITH
Room 916-231 N. Fifth Ave.
CHICAGO, ILL.

Ship me a No. 2 L. C. Smith F. O. B. Chicago, as described in this advertisement. I will pay you the \$40.00 balance of the SPECIAL \$48.80 purchase price, at the rate of \$2.50 per month, the title to remain in you until fully paid for. It is understood that I have five days in which to examine and try the typewriter. If I choose not to keep it I will carefully repack it and return it to the express agent. It is understood that you give the standard guarantee for one year.

completely visible at all times, has the tabulator, the two color ribbon, with automatic reverse, the back spacer, ball bearing type bars, ball bearing carriage action, ball bearing shift action, in fact every late style feature and modern operating convenience. Comes to you with everything complete, tools, cover, operating book and instructions, ribbon, practice paper—nothing extra to buy. **You cannot imagine the perfection of this beautiful reconstructed typewriter until you have seen it.** I have sold several thousand of these perfect latest style Model No. 2 machines at this bargain price and every one of these thousands of satisfied customers had this beautiful, strictly up to date machine on five days' free trial before deciding to buy it. I will send it to you F. O. B. Chicago for five days' free trial. It will sell itself, but if you are not satisfied that this is the greatest typewriter you ever saw, you can return it at my expense. You won't want to return it after you try it—**you cannot equal this wonderful value anywhere.**

You Take No Risk—Put In Your Order Now

When the typewriter arrives deposit with the express agent \$8.80 and take the machine for five days' trial. If you are convinced that it is the best typewriter you ever saw, keep it and send me \$2.50 a month until my bargain price of \$48.80 is paid. If you don't want it, return it to the express agent, receive your \$8.80 and return the machine to me. I will pay the return express charges. **This machine is guaranteed just as if you paid \$100.00 for it.** It is standard. Over one hundred thousand people own and use these typewriters and think them the best ever manufactured.

The supply at this price is very limited, the price will probably be raised when my next advertisement appears, so don't delay. Fill in the coupon today—mail to me—the typewriter will be shipped promptly. There is no red tape. Employ no solicitors—no collectors—no chattel mortgage. It is simply understood that I retain title to the machine until the full \$48.80 is paid. You cannot lose. It is the greatest typewriter opportunity you will ever have. Do not send me one cent. Get the coupon in the mails today—sure.

Name

Address

Harry A. Smith 916-231 N. Fifth Ave. Chicago



Alive With the National Spirit!

That lively, quick-action, hit-the-mark-every-time taste of "Bull" Durham has made it the Smoke of the Service from Maine to the Philippines. There's crisp, brisk snap to a fresh-rolled "Bull" Durham cigarette that just suits men of spunk and spirit.

GENUINE "BULL" DURHAM SMOKING TOBACCO

A "roll your own" "Bull" Durham cigarette has distinctiveness—character—personality.

It gives you that wonderful mellow-sweet flavor and unique aroma which are not found in any other tobacco. And "Bull" Durham is so delightfully mild that you enjoy it more and more.

Learn to "roll your own" with "Bull" Durham—a few trials will do it—and you'll get far more enjoyment out of smoking.

THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

Ask for FREE
package of
papers with
each 5c sack.





Copyright U.S.A. 1916 by
The B.V.D. Company

“Pa’s Got His New B.V.D.s On”

HE had old-fashioned notions about Underwear, until the Boys went out, bought B.V.D. and made him put it on. Look at him! Now, Pa joins right in the young folks’ fun, because he’s cool.

Loose fitting, light woven B.V.D. Underwear starts with the best possible fabrics (specially woven and tested), continues with the best possible workmanship (carefully inspected and re-inspected), and ends with complete comfort (fullness of cut, balance of drape, correctness of fit, durability in wash and wear).



Copyright U.S.A. 1916 by
The B.V.D. Company

If it *hasn't*
This Red
Woven Label



It *isn't*
B. V. D.
Underwear

(Trade Mark Reg. U. S. Pat. Off. and Foreign Countries)

B.V.D. Closed Crotch
Union Suits (Pat.
U. S. A.) \$1.00 and
upward the Suit.

B.V.D. Coat Cut Under-
shirts and Knee Length
Drawers, 50c. and
upward the Garment.

*The B.V.D. Company,
New York.*

London Selling Agency: 66, Aldermanbury, E. C.



Copyright U.S.A. 1916 by
The B.V.D. Company

THE ARGOSY

CONTENTS FOR JUNE, 1916

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE

SHIPS OF STRIFE.....CAPTAIN A. E. DINGLE 385
CHAPTERS I—XVIII

THREE SERIAL STORIES

HIS MAD MOVE ON THE MOVIES. In Three Parts—I...STEPHEN BRANDISH 471
CHAPTERS I—V

FROM DUSK TO DARK. In Three Parts—II.....GEORGE M. A. CAIN 497
CHAPTERS VII—XII (with Synopsis)

THE OLD WEST PER CONTRACT. In Two Parts—II..WILLIAM WALLACE COOK 540
CHAPTERS VI—XIII (with Synopsis)

SIX SHORT STORIES

TWELVE A WEEK SHORT.....GEORGE MARIANO 449

THREE DRIVES.....GEORGE FOXHALL 491

SOLID IVORY.....GEORGE M. JOHNSON 520

MOVIE MEN FOR A DAY.....NEIL MORAN 527

OI! OI!! OI!!!.....A. JUDSON HANNA 563

A WATCHFUL WAITER.....JOHN BLUNT 568

THE LOG-BOOK.....THE EDITOR 572

INFINITE VARIETY

marks the July ARGOSY. Upper New York figures as the background
for the book-length novel—

“A SECRET OF THE BRONX”

By Seward W. Hopkins

Author of “A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park,” etc.

while New Orleans, the Atlantic Ocean and France furnish the settings for the
stirring new romance in three parts, the first chapters of which
appear next month, under the title

“THE STAR OF ADVENTURE,” by Perley Poore Sheehan

Then there will be an unusual number of short stories, including

“MARIANNA GOES TO SLEEP, by Frank Condon, and “HEREDITY TAKES THE COUNT,” by Berton Braley.

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York, and Temple House, Temple Avenue, E. C., London

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President

RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary

CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

Single copies, 10 cents. By the year, \$1.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$1.50 to Canada, and \$2.00 to Foreign Countries. Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

ISSUED MONTHLY. COPYRIGHT, 1916, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY



Classified Advertising

The Purpose of this Department

is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needfuls for the home, office, farm, or person; to offer, or seek, an unusual business opportunity, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

Classified Advertising Rates in The Munsey Magazines

	Line Rate.	Special Combination Line Rate
Munsey's Magazine	\$2.00	
The Argosy	1.30	
Railroad Man's Magazine	.80	\$4.49
All-Story Weekly	.60	Less 3% cash discount.
	\$4.70	

July Argosy Forms Close May 18th.

"A New Force In Business" is a booklet that tells how to advertise successfully in the Classified Department of the Munsey Magazines. Mailed anywhere on request.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

WANTED—BRANCH MANAGERS FOR MAIL ORDER BUSINESS AT YOUR OWN HOME. Selling new and popular household novelties. NO CANVASSING. Mail or hand the catalogues we send you and make \$2.00 to \$50.00. One young married couple made over \$310.00 in two months. You can do the same. WE FURNISH EVERYTHING. If you have a few hours each day and would like to make money write us, enclosing a self addressed stamped envelope for particulars. IRVIN & GRAHAM, 161 BROADWAY, NEW YORK.

ONE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD—We will forfeit \$1,000 if this is not the greatest money-making house-to-house proposition advertised in these columns. N.R.G. Little Wizard Labor Saver washes clothes in 10 minutes absolutely without rubbing. It contains no paraffin or wax and there is nothing like it on the market. Sells for 15c; enough for five family washings. We supply you with all the free samples you need. All you do is to leave the free sample with the housewife and when you call again she is waiting to become your steady and permanent customer. This is positively the most scientific and wonderful labor saver of the age, and you will make a great mistake if you do not secure territorial rights at once. A one-cent postal card brings full particulars. Farquhar-Moon Mfg. Co., Dept. M-201, 140 W. Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

BIG PAYING BUSINESS: Energetic men wanted everywhere for new mail order agency jobbing enterprise; spare time or whole; good for \$50 weekly; cash orders every mail. We give \$100. Sales campaign free; few dollars and services starts steady business. Ercio, 25 West 42nd Street, New York.

AGENTS WANTED.—AGENTS MAKE 500 PER CENT PROFIT selling "Novelty Sign Cards." Merchants buy 10 to 100 on sight. 600 varieties. Catalogue Free. Sullivan Co., 1233 W. Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

SWELL SUIT FREE FOR 2 HOURS' WORK. Show it to your friends and make \$5.00 an hour in your spare time. We show how. Costs nothing to try. Write quick for measure blank and our handy sample outfit. All Free. We deliver everything free. Look into this. Paragon Tailoring Co., Dept. 602, Chicago.

SMOKER WANTED.—WE WANT SILENT SALESMEN who will smoke a pipe and get paid for it. Send no money, just write for particulars. M. H. Putnam, 607 West 51st Street, New York City.

AGENTS—500% PROFIT. Free Sample Gold and Silver Sign Letters for store fronts and office windows. Anyone can put on. Big demand everywhere. Write today for liberal offer to agents. Metallic Letter Co., 409 N. Clark, Chicago, U. S. A.

MALN WANTED AS EXCLUSIVE AGENT. We manufacture six styles self-wringing Mops, for all purposes, including an absolutely new combination Scrubbing Brushmop that is self-wringing. Every woman wants this proven success. New inexperienced men make \$9 per day. One man made \$120 the second week, no investment. Send for catalogue and exclusive territory proposition that will make you independent. Hilker Mop Co., 2620 W. Grand Avenue, Chicago, Ill.

FREE SAMPLE—NOSPLASH WATER STRAINERS SELL THEMSELVES. No talking—experience unnecessary. Daily profits \$5 upwards. Send 2c (mailing cost). L. K. D. Union Filter Co., New York.

ACT QUICK! AUTOMOBILE GASOLINE GOING UP. SELL GASO-TONIC. Equals gasoline at 3c a gallon. Eliminates Carbon. Dollar an hour profit. Sales guaranteed. White Mfg. Co., Dept. L, Cincinnati, Ohio.

WE START YOU IN BUSINESS, FURNISHING EVERYTHING; men and women. \$30.00 to \$200.00 weekly operating our "New System Specialty Candy Factories," home or small room anywhere. No canvassing. Opportunity Lifetime. Booklet free. Ragsdale Co., Drawer 92, East Orange, N. J.

AGENTS—BIG SUMMER SELLER; Something New; Concentrated Soft Drinks. Just add water; delicious drinks in a jiffy—any time, anywhere. Big sellers for home, picnics, parties, socials, etc. Guaranteed under Pure Food Laws. Carry in pocket. Agents coin money—\$6 to \$12 a day. Write for Free Outfit offer today. American Products Co., 4761 3rd St., Cincinnati, Ohio.

RELIABLE PEOPLE WANTED To Place Our Orangeade Powder in stores and apportion agents. Makes the most delicious drink you ever tasted by just adding cold water and sugar. Enough for 7 glasses and particulars 10 cents postpaid. Morrissey Company, A-4417-20 Madison Street, Chicago, Ill.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

\$50.00 A WEEK UP. ALL THE FREE CLOTHES YOU WANT TO WEAR simply to advertise us. Write today for self-measuring blanks, style chart, big book of samples, etc. Send no money. A postal card brings all. We pay expressage on everything. American Woolen Mills Co., Dept. 602, Chicago.

Armstrong Earned \$67.50 First Day selling our new business necessity. Retail \$5.00 to \$30.00. Agents profit 150%. Buyer satisfied or money back. No competition. Exclusive territory. Free sample. Sayers Co., 412 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

WOULD YOU INVEST \$100.00 IN OUR PREMIUM PUNCH BOARD DEALS, if we could show you how to double your money within 30 days? There is a big demand for our premiums. Washington Sales Company, Dept. A, Chicago.

Agents Make Big Money selling our water-proof aprons to men and women. Made in white and black. H. Marvin, Georgia, sold 138 in 5 days. Profit \$69.00. Fast sellers. Large profits. Exclusive territory. Pelham Mfg. Co., Smith Bldg., Pelham, N. Y.

AGENTS—400 SNAPPY ALUMINUM SPECIALTIES AND UTENSILS means a sale in every home. General Sales Course Free. \$50.00 a week sure. Answer quick. American Aluminum Mfg. Co., Division S-46, Lemont, Ill.

AGENTS—ARE YOU LOOKING FOR BIG PROFITS and a sure repeat business? Write for Ho-Ro-Co Skin Soap, Perfume and Toilet Article plan, the best ever put out. Rothco, 222 N. Second Street, St. Louis, Mo.

HERE'S A NEW WAY TO MAKE FROM \$20 TO \$60 A WEEK, building a permanent, staple business for yourself. Learn Cole's Secret Process and clear 86c on every Dollar. Art Promotion Service, 302 Cass Building, Detroit, Mich.

1916'S SENSATION! 11 PIECE TOILET ARTICLE SET selling like blazes at \$1, with \$1 carving set free! Whirlwind stunt! Newcome made \$18 one day! Write B. Pierce Company, 906 Lake Street, Chicago.

\$15.00 MADE FIRST DAY by Appelget with Shomescope. Miss Spencer \$3.00 first hour. More agents wanted. Particulars free. Shomescope Mfg. Co., 539 W. 13th St., Kansas City, Mo.

AGENTS \$60 A WEEK TO TRAVEL BY AUTOMOBILE and introduce our 300 candle power coal-oil lantern. Write for particulars of our free auto offer. Thomas Co., 807 North St., Dayton, Ohio.

DO YOU WANT AGENTS AND SALESMEN TO SELL YOUR MERCHANDISE? Men and women who are educated in personal salesmanship and know the house-to-house, office, and store canvassing proposition. These advertisers are getting them year in and year out, and there are thousands more for you among the 5,000,000 readers of The Munsey Magazines. We have prepared a book entitled "A New Force In Business" that goes into the details of the subject. This book we shall gladly send to any one on request. The Frank A. Munsey Company, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York City.

WOMEN AGENTS WANTED

Responsible Lady Canvassers Wanted to take exclusive agency for children's and ladies' dresses and middie blouses. Absolutely new. Sell on sight. Big income. All or spare time. Write for particulars. Girls Wearing Apparel Co., 126 Wooster St., New York.

BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

ADVERTISERS, MAIL DEALERS! OUR ADVERTISING GUIDE gives rates, circulation of 2,000 different publications, includes 30 mail order plans. Sent complete 10c. Dearborn Advertising Agency, 222 Franklin Building, Chicago.

Become a Minute Photographer. Pleasant outdoor work. Experience unnecessary. Profitable business. Hundreds of men and women make \$10 to \$35 per day. Sample picture and catalog free. Jamestown Perotype Co., Dept. F, 1126 So. Halsted St., Chicago.

TELEGRAPHY

LEARN TELEGRAPHY AT HOME IN HALF USUAL TIME and trifling cost with wonderful Automatic Transmitter, the Omnisgraph. Connected with sounder or buzzer sends unlimited Morse or Continental messages, at any speed, just as expert operator would. Adopted by U. S. Government. Catalog free. Omnisgraph Mfg. Co., 39 R. Cortlandt Street, New York.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS THAT PROTECT AND PAY. ADVICE AND BOOKS FREE. Highest references. Best results. Promptness assured. Send sketch or model for search. Watson E. Coleman, 624 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENT YOUR IDEAS—\$9,000 OFFERED FOR CERTAIN INVENTIONS. Books, "How to Obtain a Patent," and "What to Invent," sent free. Send rough sketch for free report as to patentability. Manufacturers constantly writing us for patents we have obtained. We advertise your patent for sale at our expense. Established 20 years. Address Chandlee & Chandlee, Patent Attorneys, 911 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS.—WRITE FOR HOW TO OBTAIN A PATENT. List of Patent Buyers, and Inventions Wanted. \$1,000,000 in prizes offered for inventions. Send Sketch for free opinion as to patentability. Our Four Books sent free upon request. Patents advertised Free. We assist inventors to sell their patents. Victor J. Evans Co., Patent Attys., 756 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

"PRIZES FOR PATENTS." "MONEY IN PATENTS." "How to Get Your Patents and Money," "Why Some Inventors Fail," "Needed Inventions." Sent free. Randolph & Co., Patent Attorneys, 629 F Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—TRADE-MARKS. SEND FOR MY FREE BOOK "HOW TO GET THEM." It's full of information you should know. Joshua R. H. Potts, 8 S. Dearborn St., Chicago; 929 Chestnut St., Philadelphia; 805 G St., Washington.

PATENTS PROTECT YOUR IDEAS. INFORMATION AND ADVICE FREE. Send sketch or model for search. J. E. Smith, 724 Bond Building, Washington, D. C.

IDEAS WANTED.—Manufacturers are writing for patents procured through me. Three books with list hundreds of inventions wanted sent free. I help you market your invention. Advice Free. R. B. Owen, 68 Owen Bldg., Washington, D. C.

TYPEWRITERS

TYPEWRITER PRICES SMASHED. Spot Cash Offer will save you money. Rebuilt L. C. Smiths, Oliviers, Remingtons, Underwoods and Royals; your choice of 500 machines at \$10 to \$15. Guaranteed for 3 years. Send today for descriptive circular. Dearborn Typewriter Exchange, Dept. 2-A, Chicago, Ill.

\$10 TO \$15 BUYS A RE-BUILT TYPEWRITER—GOOD AS NEW. Why pay more? Shipped on Trial. Whitehead Typewriter Company, Dept. A, 186 N. LaSalle Street, Chicago, Illinois.

STAMPS AND RARE COINS

Will Pay \$3.00 To \$10.00 For Flying Eagle Cent Dated 1856. We pay cash premiums on all rare dimes, quarters, etc., and all rare coins to 1912. Thousands of coins and bills wanted. Send 4c for our Large Illustrated Coin Circular. May mean large profits to you. Numismatic Bank, Dept. M, Fort Worth, Texas.

\$4.25 PAID FOR FLYING EAGLE CENTS dated 1856. We pay a cash premium on hundreds of old coins. Send 10c at once for New Illustrated Coin Value Book, 427. It may mean your fortune. Clarke & Co., Coin Dealers, Box 101, Le Roy, N. Y.

PHOTOGRAPHY

Kodakers! Amateurs!—Do not spoil good pictures by having them poorly developed and printed. Our work sets the standard excelled by none. Send us negative for free sample print and price list. G. L. Hall Optical Co., Dept. A, Norfolk, Richmond, Lynchburg, Va.

LOOSE-LEAF BOOKS

EVERYBODY SHOULD CARRY A LOOSE-LEAF MEMO BOOK. Why? Because it is economic. Send 25c for a sample book with Genuine Leather covers and 50 sheets. Name on cover in gold 15c extra. Looseleaf Book Co., 81½ E. 125th St., N. Y.

REAL ESTATE—FARM LANDS

MISSISSIPPI

IS HE CRAZY? The owner of a plantation in Mississippi is giving away five fine-acre tracts. The only condition is that figs be planted. The owner wants enough figs raised to supply a Canning Factory. You can secure five acres and an interest in the Factory by writing Eubank Farms Company, 783 Keystone, Pittsburgh, Pa. They will plant and care for your trees for \$6 per month. Your profit should be \$1,000 per year. Some think this man is crazy for giving away such valuable land, but there may be method in his madness.

ADVERTISING MEDIA

WHEN ARE YOU GOING TO GRASP THE OPPORTUNITIES that are offered by The Munsey Magazine? Probably you have a business that cannot be advertised. Hundreds of men all over the country have made this assertion, yet they make goods that some people somewhere need and buy. We believe that it would be to your advantage to use the Classified Section of The Munsey Magazine. Many advertisers use this department month after month, year after year, which is proof positive that it is paying them. Write for booklet "A New Force in Business" that gives full particulars about the effectiveness of Classified Advertising in The Munsey Magazine. The Frank A. Munsey Company, 8 West Fortieth Street, New York, N. Y.

HELP WANTED

Graphic Shorthand In One Week—home study. Six easy lessons. One alphabet—no shading—no "positions." Scientifically accurate—based on longhand. Learn the alphabet, begin writing. Particulars free. Address Avon Business School, Brooklyn, N. Y.

MEN AND WOMEN, \$20 TO \$35 PER MONTH EXTRA MONEY to any employed persons without interfering with regular work. No selling. No canvassing. Positively no investment. Unemployed need not apply. Address The Silver Mirror Co., Inc., 121 W. Madison Street, Chicago, Ill.

MEN AND WOMEN OVER 18—WANTED. \$65.00 to \$150.00 Month. U. S. Government Life Jobs. Common education. Write immediately for list of positions open to you. Franklin Institute, Dept. K-1, Rochester, N. Y.

BE A DETECTIVE.—EARN FROM \$150.00 TO \$300.00 PER MONTH. Travel over the world. Write C. T. Ludwig, 126 Westover Building, Kansas City, Mo.

DO YOU WANT A POSITION FOR LIFE, with big pay, short hours and sure advancement? Then work for Uncle Sam. My free illustrated book D K-18 tells how to get an appointment. Earl Hopkins, Washington, D. C.

WILL POSITIVELY SHOW YOU BY MAIL HOW YOU CAN EARN \$25 TO \$100 WEEK writing advertisements. Biggest field in the world for you. Information free. Page-Davis Co., 241 Page Building, Chicago, Ill.

I WILL START YOU EARNING \$4.00 DAILY AT HOME in spare time, silvering mirrors. No capital. Anyone can do the work. Send for free instructive booklet, giving plans of operation. G. F. Redmond, Dept. B, Boston, Mass.

WILL ADVANCE EXPENSES and pay straight weekly salary of \$18.00 to man or woman with fair education and good references. No canvassing. Staple line. Old-established firm. G. M. Nichols, Philadelphia, Pa., Pepper Building.

FIVE BRIGHT, CAPABLE LADIES TO TRAVEL, demonstrate and sell dealers. \$25 to \$50 per week. Railroad fare paid. Goodrich Drug Company, Dept. 58, Omaha, Neb.

GOVERNMENT POSITIONS PAY BIG MONEY. Examinations everywhere soon. Get prepared by former United States Civil Service Examiner. 64 page booklet free. Write to-day. Patterson Civil Service School, Box 1403, Rochester, N. Y.

MEN OF IDEAS AND INVENTIVE ABILITY should write for new "Lists of Needed Inventions," Patent Buyers, and "How to Get Your Patent and Your Money." Advice free. Randolph & Co., Patent Attorneys, Dept. 40, Washington, D. C.

MEN AND WOMEN WITH SPARE TIME CAN EARN A LOT OF EXTRA MONEY by our new and interesting advertising plan. No investment. No Selling. No Soliciting. Write to-day. Crown Mfg. Co., Dept. K-9, 20 W. Lake St., Chicago.

WRITE NEWS ITEMS AND SHORT STORIES FOR PAY in spare time. Copyright book and plans free. Press Reporting Syndicate, 433, St. Louis, Mo.

LADIES—MAKE SHIELDS AT HOME, \$10 PER 100; no canvassing required. Send stamped-addressed envelope for particulars. Eureka Co., Dept. 41, Kalamazoo, Mich.

BE A FINGER PRINT EXPERT—Earn from \$2,000.00 or over per year. Be independent. Travel. Big opportunities. Thode School of Finger Prints, Dept. B, 2067 Grove Street, San Francisco, California.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS

Write Moving Picture Plays, \$25 To \$100 Each. Big demand. Previous experience or literary talent not required. No correspondence course. Send today for free details explaining everything. E-Z Scenario Co., A-M, 609 W. 127 St., New York City.

PHOTOPLAYS WANTED BY 48 COMPANIES; \$10 TO \$500 EACH PAID FOR PLAYS. No correspondence course or experience needed; details sent free to beginners. Sell your ideas. Producers League, 331 Wainwright, St. Louis, Mo.

MOTION PICTURE PLAYS WANTED, \$25 TO \$100. You can write them. We show you how. Experience unnecessary. New, easy, fascinating way to earn money in spare time. Get free details. Rex Publishers, Box 175, M-13, Chicago.

WRITE MOVING PICTURE PLAYS, SHORT STORIES, Poems; \$10 to \$300 each. Constant demand. No correspondence course. Start writing and selling at once. Details free. Atlas Pub. Co., 316 Atlas Building, Cincinnati, Ohio.

WRITE PHOTOPLAYS. BIG PRICES PAID. CONSTANT demand. Devote all or spare time. Experience or correspondence course not necessary. Start work at once. Send for free details. Enterprise Publishing Co., A-Y, 3348 Lowe Avenue, Chicago.

AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

WANTED—STORIES, ARTICLES, POEMS, ETC. We pay on acceptance. Offers submitted. Handwritten MSS. acceptable. Please send prepaid with return postage. Cosmos Magazine, 206 Stewart Building, Washington, D. C.

SCENARIOS, PLOTS, STORIES WANTED. Submit in any form. No correspondence school agency; well paid for when accepted; no crime stories; protection guaranteed. Inclose return postage. California Scenario Company, Inc., Los Angeles, Calif.

The World's Best Magazine

For Ten Cents
a Copy

BUY the June Number of
Munsey's, on sale May
20 at all news-stands.

Containing a Complete Novelette,
"Atmosphere," by Eleanor
Mercein Kelly, a fascinating
story of an American woman's
experiences in Europe;

"Children of Passion," by Mary
Imlay Taylor, a dramatic and
remarkable story of life in one
of our State capitals;

Six Good Short Stories by Frank
R. Adams, Harold Titus, Free-
man Tilden, Clarence Meily,
Katharine Hill, and Mary H.
Wade;

"The Confessions of a War
Broker," by Frank B. Elser,
telling how a speculator in war
contracts failed to make the
millions he expected;

"The Stage," with portraits of
favorite actors and actresses;
also other articles, with many
illustrations, poetry, etc.

The June Munsey Ten Cents a Copy

The Frank A. Munsey Company
8 West Fortieth Street, New York City

Statement of the ownership,
management, etc., of THE
ARGOSY, published monthly at
New York, N. Y., for April 1st,
1916. Required by the Act of
Congress of August 24th, 1912.

NOTE—This statement is to be made in duplicate,
both copies to be delivered by the publisher to the
Postmaster, who will send one copy to the Third Assis-
tant Postmaster-General (Division of Classification),
Washington, D. C., and retain the other in the files of
the Post-Office.

State of NEW YORK } s.s.:
County of BRONX }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State
and County aforesaid, personally appeared WM. T.
DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according
to law, deposes and says that he is the General
Manager of THE ARGOSY, and that the following is,
to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true
statement of the ownership, management, etc., of
the aforesaid publication for the date shown in
the above caption, required by the Act of August
24th, 1912, embodied in Section 443, Postal Laws
and Regulations:

Publisher—THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY,
8 West 40th Street, New York, N. Y.

Editor—MATTHEW WHITE, JR., 8 West 40th
Street, New York, N. Y.

Managing Editor, MATTHEW WHITE JR., 8 West
40th Street, New York, N. Y.

General Manager—WM. T. DEWART, 8 West 40th
Street, New York, N. Y.

Owners: (If a corporation give its name and the
names and addresses of stockholders owning and hold-
ing 1 per cent or more of total amount of stock.)

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 West 40th
Street, New York, N. Y.

FRANK A. MUNSEY, 8 West 40th Street, New
York, N. Y.

Known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security
holders, owning and holding 1 per cent or more of total
amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities:

There are no bonds, mortgages, or other securi-
ties against THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names
of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any,
contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as
they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases
where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the
books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary rela-
tion, the name of the person or corporation for whom such
trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs con-
tain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief
as to the circumstances and conditions under which stock-
holders and security holders who do not appear upon the books
of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capa-
city other than that of bona fide owner; and this affiant has no
reason to believe that any other person, association, or corpora-
tion has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds,
or other securities than as so stated by him.

WM. T. DEWART, General Manager.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day
of April, 1916.

F. G. RUDOLPH, Notary Public, Bronx County.

Term expires March 30th, 1917.

Certificate filed in New York County.

Bronx County, No. 37.

New York County, No. 239.

{ SEAL }

Become a TRAFFIC EXPERT

Earn \$35 to \$100 a week. Exceptional opportunities await the trained traffic man with railways and industrial shippers. Our free literature explains fully the possibilities for good salaries and rapid advancement in this uncrowded and lucrative field, and how

We Train You By Mail

at home, in spare time without interference with your present occupation. The LaSalle course in Traffic and Transportation is simple and thorough—readily and easily mastered—the practical work of highly efficient traffic experts. Endorsed by prominent railway and industrial traffic officials. Small cost—terms to suit you. Mail postal today for catalog and free book, "Ten Years' Promotion in One."

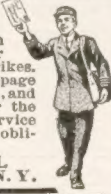
LaSALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, CHICAGO, ILLINOIS
Dept. 635-C

MAIL
POSTAL
NOW!

GOVERNMENT POSITIONS

offer employment for life at a salary ranging from \$800 to \$1800 per year, with short hours under pleasant conditions and no fear of "layoffs" or strikes. American citizens 18 or over are eligible. Our 64-page booklet contains list of positions, requirements, etc., and tells how you can prepare for "Exams" under the personal supervision of a former U. S. Civil Service Secretary-Examiner. Booklet is FREE, without obligation. Write today.

PATTERSON CIVIL SERVICE SCHOOL
1316 Irving Place ROCHESTER, N. Y.



LAW

AMERICAN CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOL OF LAW, Dept. A107 Manhattan Bldg., Chicago

LEARN AT HOME

SPARE TIME ONLY

Graduate correspondence students most successful at bar examinations. Our method of instruction same as HARVARD, MICHIGAN and other big Law Schools. GUARANTEE to coach FREE graduates failing to pass Bar Examinations. Write today for special offer and catalog. (Sent FREE). Offer limited. — WRITE IMMEDIATELY.

COPY THIS SKETCH

and let me see what you can do with it. Illustrators and cartoonists earn from \$30 to \$135 a week or more. My practical system of personal individual lessons by mail will develop your talent. Fifteen years successful work for newspapers and magazines qualifies me to teach you. Send me your sketch of President Wilson with 6c in stamps and I will send you a test lesson plate, also collection of drawings showing possibilities for YOU.

The Landon School of Illustrating and Cartooning
1429 Schofield Building, CLEVELAND, O.



DO YOU LIKE TO DRAW?

Cartoonists are well paid

We will not give you any grand prize if you answer this ad. Nor can we claim to make you rich in a week. But if you are anxious to develop your talent with a successful cartoonist, you can make money, send a copy of this picture, with 6c in stamps for portfolio of cartoons and sample lesson plate, and let us explain.

The W. L. Evans School of Cartooning
841 Leader Bldg. Cleveland, O.

BE A TRAVELING SALESMAN

Hundreds of good positions now open. No experience required to get one of them. Write today for list of openings offering opportunities to earn Big Money while you learn and testimonials from hundreds of our students who are earning \$100 to \$500 a month. Address nearest office, Dept. 500

NATIONAL SALESMEN'S TRAINING ASSOCIATION
Chicago, New York, San Francisco

FACTORY TO RIDER

Saves you big money. Buy direct and save \$10 to \$20 on a bicycle. RANGER BICYCLES now come in 94 styles, colors and sizes. Greatly improved; prices reduced. Other reliable models, \$11.95 up. **WE DELIVER FREE** to you on approval and 30 days trial and riding test. Our big **FREE** catalog shows everything new in bicycles and sundries. Write for it. **TIRES**, lamps, wheels, parts and supplies at half usual prices.

Do not buy a bicycle, tires or sundries until you write and learn our wonderful new offers, low prices and liberal terms. A postal brings everything. Write now.

MEAD CYCLE CO. DEPT. H-31, CHICAGO

1916 Model



This Job Needs a Trained Man

You've reached your limit. You can't expect to step into a job that pays a big salary until you've prepared yourself for it.

It's a serious question, this problem of getting ahead. There is only one solution—you must have *training*; you must be able to do work that others *can't* do, or your pay will stay on a level with theirs.

The business of the International Correspondence Schools is to help just such men as you to get good positions and hold them.

Right now over one hundred thousand ambitious men are preparing themselves through I. C. S. courses for the bigger jobs ahead. Last year nearly five thousand reported increased pay as the result of I. C. S. training. These men got their training in spare time and in their own homes. What the I. C. S. have done for others they can surely do for you. But you must make a start—the same start that they made—and the way has been made easy for you. Mark and mail this coupon.

I. C. S., Box 2311, Scranton, Pa.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 2311, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER ☐ Electric Lighting ☐ Electric Car Running ☐ Electric Wiring ☐ Telegraph Expert ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER ☐ Mechanical Draftsman ☐ Machine Shop Practice ☐ Gas Engineer ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER ☐ Surveying and Mapping ☐ NINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER ☐ Metallurgist or Prospector ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER ☐ Marine Engineer ☐ ARCHITECT ☐ Contractor and Builder ☐ Architectural Draftsman ☐ Concrete Builder ☐ Structural Engineer ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING ☐ Sheet Metal Worker ☐ CHEMICAL ENGINEER	☐ SALESMANSHIP ☐ ADVERTISING MAN ☐ Window Trimmer ☐ Show Card Writer ☐ RAILROADER ☐ ILLUSTRATOR ☐ DESIGNER ☐ BOOKKEEPER ☐ Stenographer and Typist ☐ Cert. Public Accountant ☐ Railway Mail Clerk ☐ Commercial Law ☐ GOOD ENGLISH ☐ Teacher ☐ Common School Subjects ☐ CIVIL SERVICE ☐ Agriculture ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt. ☐ Navigator ☐ Poultry Raising ☐ AUTOMOBILES ☐ Auto Repairing
---	---

Name _____

Occupation & Employer _____

Street and No. _____

City _____ State _____



**Send for
Free Book**



Six shot, 32 cal. with
"Western" Grip, \$7.50
Other models, \$6. to \$8.

IVER JOHNSON

ONLY about three machine shops in the country have fine enough machinery to make a revolver. You can possess in an Iver Johnson Revolver as perfect a mechanism as was ever made of tempered steel. It will give you a lifetime of protection. An Iver Johnson is safe, for accidental discharge is absolutely impossible. You can "Hammer the Hammer."

This same wonderful quality of machine workmanship produces the Iver Johnson Bicycle. Which explains why, since bicycles were first invented, the Iver Johnson has led. There is no more comparison between an Iver Johnson Bicycle and an ordinary bicycle than between a fine watch and an alarm clock. This superiority shows in speed and ease of riding, long life of bearings and absence of repairs. Also the Iver Johnson finish of five coats of baked, hand-rubbed enamel is better than the usual paint and varnish finish. The frame is of seamless steel tubing, not welded tubing.

Before you buy a shot gun, inspect our new double-barrel gun and our splendid line of single-barrel shot guns.

Our 84-page Book tells all about Revolvers, Shot Guns, Bicycles and Motorcycles. It tells you what you must know to get highest value for your money. Your copy is free.

**IVER JOHNSON'S ARMS
& CYCLE WORKS**

**140 River Street
Fitchburg, Mass.**

99 Chambers St., New York
717 Market St., San Francisco

**Everybody's
Riding
This Year**



This is our \$40. model, the finest roadster we ever made. Other models from \$30. to \$55. Juveniles, \$20. to \$25.

THE ARGOSY

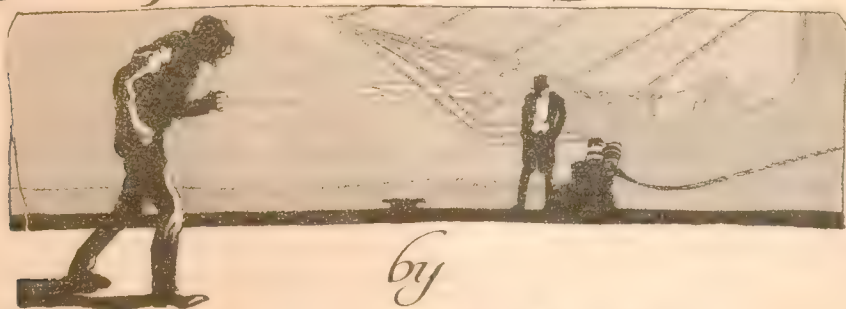
Vol. LXXXII

JUNE, 1916

No. 3



Ships of Strife



by
Captain A. E. Dingle

Author of "Made at Sea," "The New Skipper," "The Sultan's Barge," etc.

A FULL BOOK-LENGTH NOVEL COMPLETE.

CHAPTER I.

NOT THE SCRAP HE EXPECTED.

STANDING on the club steps, Jack Blake directed his chauffeur to take the car home without him. Then he turned to the noisy and vociferous group of men filling the doorway at his back. At sound of his voice they fell silent.

"A bet of five hundred is worth a scrap, boys," he smiled. "But I won't have any. I'll show up to claim those stakes, all intact, and with three cool drinks of milk inside me!"

"Yes, you will!" echoed the derisive shout, halting Blake as he started down the

steps to the sidewalk. "You'll come back with that topper smashed and your coat-tails torn off, old sport! Bet you another hundred you call in the cops!"

"You're on!" exclaimed Blake sharply. "So long!"

Tucking his stick beneath his arm, he gave his silk hat a natty tip with a Cohan-esque pat of the hand; then he vanished into the fog which had drifted in from the Golden Gate to hide the stars and to cloak all San Francisco in darkness.

The Millionaires' Club was the home of freak bets, but Jack Blake had that night provided the liveliest game of all. A heated discussion had ended in the wager that

Blake, correctly attired in evening dress, could not procure three drinks of milk in as many water-front saloons—and return intact to tell the tale.

Blake himself had some doubt over his ability to win that wager, but his confidence in Jack Blake banished his forebodings. Nor was this self-confidence founded on egotism and the possession of worldly pelf, as a glance at his face alone would have shown.

This, the youngest member of the Millionaires' Club, was indubitably a good-looking man. He had never had to work for his living, and had devoted his energy to having a good time—in his own way.

His keen gray eyes held the promise of powerful character, should that character ever be evoked into action; so, too, did thin nostrils, the thin, curved lips and the out-jutting bone of the chin which Blake had inherited from his fighting father.

As a polo-player, Blake was known from Coronado to Newport; as an amateur boxer he was of far less renown, though of accomplished skill, for his blazing temper was little suited to the ring.

Being his own master and having plenty of this world's goods, Jack Blake had no quarrel with life. Twenty-three, a passable athlete and something of a boxer, he considered himself the equal of any man alive. And, being convinced that the waterfront was not so bad as it was painted, he broke into a cheerful whistle as he strode along.

Fresh from a perfect dinner—for the club *chef* was an admitted master of his art—Jack Blake bubbled over with the wine of youth and good spirits. As he sniffed hard at the swirling gray fog, laden with the brine of the Pacific, his pulses leaped high in keep anticipation of his adventure.

He cut short the cheerful whistle, but only for the instant required to relieve himself of a ringing laugh of pure exhilaration. Then the whistle pealed out afresh, echoing eerily back to him from the murky caverns of gray that enveloped all things.

It was yet early for the denizens of the waterfront. Of course, the dives would shelter their habitués at every hour of the day—Blake had a vivid recollection of a previous slumming excursion to the "North Pole," where he had witnessed a real bottle fight in broad daylight.

Yet, to give his club-fellows a sporting run for their money, he determined to take

his initial drink of milk at a time when life down there was in full blast.

With this praiseworthy resolve, Blake spent half an hour in "dead reckoning" navigation of the blanketed streets by means of the greater lights of the street corners. The ordinary lamps along the sidewalks only became visible when he bumped into their standards.

As a thicker blanket of gray drifted up the sloping streets from the sea Blake, with a shiver, buttoned the light overcoat which partially concealed his evening attire. The fog grew colder as he struck into Montgomery avenue and headed down toward the ferry slips.

He had now had sufficient of this aimless wandering. It was high time, he thought, to set to work to win that wager.

Although more accustomed to be carried in his car than to walk, he had some acquaintance with the streets hereabouts, and was quite conversant with his general direction. When, in a brief instant of clarity, he found himself at the corner where Montgomery Street joined the avenue, he turned to the left and headed for the Custom House.

Now in front, Blake could catch fleeting glimpses of glaring lights at the ferry-slips. For what seemed limitless leagues of darkness, the outer night shrieked and boomed with the whistles of water craft.

Blake picked out the sparsely lighted windows of the Custom House and the brighter illumination of the post-office close by. Right across the street was the dark waterfront. There lay his cruising ground, or at least his entrance to it.

As he neared the post-office, a forlorn-looking hack drew up to the curb, discharged two fares, and lumbered off into the fog. The two passengers were brought into prominence by a lifting of the mist.

Blake saw that one was a quietly dressed girl; the other a burly, bow-legged, powerful-looking man.

These two stood in conversation for an instant, then the man disappeared into the dim doorway of the Custom House. The girl stepped into the blaze of light in the post-office door, and vanished likewise.

Blake found himself staring in most unmannerly fashion as the light shone upon the girl's slender figure, and he pulled himself up with a sharp inward rebuke. In that single instant of observation he had noted two interesting facts.

First, the girl was pretty, refined and even piquant—despite the curl-destroying dampness that fringed her small hat with glistening rime. Second, she wore an air of serious business which sat strangely upon her shapely shoulders; the swing of her walk bespoke poise, self-confidence and a fixity of purpose which interested Blake.

An instant later he collided squarely with interesting fact number three.

He squared off on his course for the waterfront, crossed the shaft of light thrown by the post-office doorway, and ran into a man who stepped out of the darkness.

The man's face was turned toward the doorway. His eyes glared after the girl's figure with a wolfish glitter that blazed into wrath as Jack Blake bumped into him.

"Where in Hades you coming?" he snarled. "You keep your eyes in the boat, Willie, an' beat it!"

Blake sent a keen look over the man, with a host of possibilities crowding into his mind.

The fellow was a good two inches taller than Blake, who brushed the bar at five feet eleven. His glittering eyes glowed like black diamonds in deep cavities under bushy brows; the shoulders of a Hercules terminated in huge, black-gloved hands at the end of gorilla-like arms; crisp black curls framed a savage face that was tanned to a brick hue and heavily lined and seamed.

Blake apologized civilly enough to this scowling personage, but not through fear. He then walked on to the Custom House and stood, hidden by the curtain of fog, watching the streak of light at the post-office doorway.

"I wonder," he mused reflectively, "what connection there is between that girl and her first escort, and this powerful savage who seems so interested? She's pretty far removed from their stratum, or I'm no judge! I guess I'll forget milk for a bit."

From this vantage point Blake could see the figure of the "savage" lurking just outside the edge of light. At frequent intervals the scowling face protruded from the rim of fog and peered into the doorway; to Blake it looked ludicrously like the head of a colored gentleman who invites the attention of "three balls for a nickel."

At this hour the streets were practically deserted. Those who might have had business in the district were glad to accept the

fog as an excuse to postpone it. Only when a ferryboat pulled into the slip did a few scurrying figures pass up or down the street.

Blake, feeling the chill of the mist piercing through his light overcoat, grew impatient as the moments wore along. He had almost decided to abandon his watch when suddenly the girl appeared.

She stepped out to the sidewalk, turned sharply to the right, and walked swiftly past Blake's hiding-place.

Before she was quite swallowed up in the fog the big fellow came striding past, head forward and arms swinging, muttering to himself as he went.

"H'm! Grows interesting!" thought Blake with a thrill of expectancy.

Gripping his stick, he followed. The man, while a scant five yards ahead, had already been lost in obscurity; but the dull, damp pad of rubber heels formed an index to his position. At the corner the foot-steps ceased, and Blake halted abruptly.

For the moment he was at a loss.

Then, from the side street near by, he heard voices—a deep rumble, followed by a girl's clear voice that was evidently charged with apprehension.

That note of fear dissipated Blake's doubts. He softly stepped nearer until he could make out a dark blur in the fog, then he slipped into the gloom of a side door to the Custom House, and waited.

He had to be sure about this, he reflected.

But with the first words, he crammed his silk hat down on his head, took off his gloves, and gripped his light stick tensely.

"Let me pass, sir!" came the girl's voice. "I don't know you."

"You'll know me soon enough, miss," growled the deep tones. "I want to talk a little business with you."

"I don't want to know you!" exclaimed the girl. "And I have no business that could possibly concern you—"

The man's growl broke in, and drew a sharp cry from the girl.

"What—impossible! Even if you had credentials, and your ship is what you say, the matter is closed. My arrangements are made. Let me pass, sir!"

"Not me, my beauty! You'll unmake your arrangements to-morrow, understand?"

The girl answered calmly, yet with desperation underlying the calm.

"Get out of my way, or I shall call for help!"

Blake, edging nearer, poised on his toes. He saw the two figures sway together, and then—

"He-e-lp!"

The girl's quick cry was strangled in its utterance as the big ruffian swung her to him, his hand over her mouth.

Blake waited no longer. In two strides he reached his man. With keen regard for the small possibilities in his stick as a club, he put his weight behind it and gave the point. The man's left arm was half raised; fair in the armpit, swift as a rapier thrust, the steel-tipped cane hit home.

With a smothered curse the girl's assailant dropped his hold upon her, swung around, snatched furiously at the cane and snapped it in two. Then, with a second curse, he plunged headlong at Blake, his huge hands outstretched to grapple.

Jack Blake knew better than this, however. He side-stepped, whipped over a streaking right cross, and the man went down with a crash.

The girl stood bewildered, unable to appreciate what had taken place. Blake swung her rapidly into the doorway he had just left.

"Go inside and leave by the front door," he cried sharply. Then he turned to meet a savage rush that all but hurled him after her.

What happened next occupied, perhaps, something less than two minutes. But those two minutes were crowded with more action than Jack Blake had ever experienced in any six-round amateur contest at the club.

Warily avoiding the clinch his huge opponent desired, Blake used every trick of footwork in his possession, slipping in and out with stinging straight punches. He had need of all he knew.

The grim shape of his enemy bored in with insistence, apparently caring nothing for the shrewdest blows. Then a left swing rocked Blake's head until he heard the bells ringing; there followed a right that made the left swing seem like a feather pillow.

Never in all his bouts had Blake ever received a punch like that one. He spat out a broken tooth, clenched his jaw, and resolved to avoid that right in future.

But in the thickening gloom it was impossible to discern the blows. Blake could hear the savage, short breaths of his opponent; he tried to time his punches, hit-

ting straight out at the breaths. Then he guarded a sweeping right, and his arm felt paralyzed from wrist to elbow.

"Great Scott!" he thought. "That right feels like a club! But he hasn't got knuckles, that's sure—"

He was smothered with a volley of stupefying wallops which swept aside his guard, and again that terrible, uncanny, unhuman right swung into him, fair and square over the heart.

Blake felt himself slipping. His brain fought to retain its balance, and he instinctively fought back, knew that he was hitting hard and solidly; yet the dim figure in front seemed to assume alarming proportions. Once more that awful right drove in over his heart.

Other shapes began to grow out of the fog, but Blake still fought doggedly, clenching back the cry that came to his lips.

He felt the Custom House walls at his back, knew he was giving ground—and could give no more. His chest was bursting. The stranger's right came over his guard and rocked his head back against the brick wall with a thud.

Through Blake's muddled brain came the drum of hurrying feet. His knees gave way and he slipped helplessly to the ground.

As through a red haze he saw that terrible right arm curved back to swing down at him—then a crowd surged around. He heard short, snappy commands, felt himself lifted, and with a dumb prayer of thanks that the police had come, passed into unconsciousness.

But—the police had not come.

CHAPTER II.

FOES AND FRIENDS.

"For grog is our larboard and starboard.
Our mainmast, our mizzen, our log;
On shore, or at sea, or when harbored,
The mariner's compass is grog!"

SOMEWHERE over his splitting head, Jack Blake heard a cracked, tinpan, maudlin voice blaring out these words. At the end of them came the gluck-gluck of liquid pouring from a bottle neck.

"Huh—did I win that bet?" he thought vaguely. "Wow—this is a head! What happened? Oh, of course—that girl—the scrap—"

He lay quiet, repressing the inward groan that was urged from him. While he quite

remembered the scene outside the Custom House, he now seemed to be in a very strange place indeed—so strange that he doubted his own senses.

His extremely misty vision gave him a queer picture of a board shelf just above his head. The bed that his fingers touched, as he half unconsciously groped out, felt strangely unlike the soft, springy couch in his room at the club.

A dull glimmer of wavering, streaky light gave him clear sight of nothing except that queer board shelf above him. But his head buzzed and ached, while his arms were swollen and raw to the touch. He remembered that terrible right.

"I must have struck a gorilla or a stone man," he thought, trying to bring order out of the chaos in his mind.

He dully closed his eyes to rest the aching nerves. He hoped that his man would have his coffee ready soon. This was—

"For grog is our larboard and starboard,
Our mainmast, our—"

"Shut yer gob, ye guzzlin' swine!"

The new voice was accompanied by something which Blake later learned to know as a serving-mallet. The mallet whizzed out of the darkness and landed with a crunching smack against the head of the singer.

"Blast yer soul!" swore the victim furiously.

His bottle flew through the air, smashing to a thousand slivers of glass, and filling the room with the odor of cheap whisky. The rank smell combined with other smells and formed an inharmonious whole.

Blake started up with a shock of realization. His head bumped the shelf above, and he fell back thoroughly awakened. He put out a leg and felt for the floor—then halted abruptly and stared.

A shape rose up before him; a huge foot trod on his hand; with lurid oaths and a tremendous scuffling, the guzzling singer was hauled down from above Blake, to fall with a crash and crouch on the floor. The larger shape towered above him.

"Hey! Let up, Cutlip! Let up, yuh big stiff!"

The cracked voice broke into whimpering as a heavy boot smashed through weakly guarding arms and landed forcibly on head and ribs, time and again.

"T'row bottles at me, will ye? There, ye hog!"

Cutlip seized the edge of the bunk above Blake in both hands; then he brought both feet savagely down upon the bottle-heaver, who groaned once and relapsed into limp insensibility.

His conqueror stepped to the middle of the floor, flapped his arms in grotesquely drunken imitation of wings, and crowed.

"Urrk-uh-uh-uh-urrrk! I'm Cutlip Sullivan, an' I chew 'em up raw! I eat alligator bait an' sharkskin fer dinner! I'm the cock o' the fo'c's'le, by cripes—any other son of a pig want to present me wid a bottle?"

Feeling that this query was hardly addressed to him, Jack Blake swung his legs to the floor, slowly and painfully.

"Will you tell me where I am and how I got there?" he inquired thickly.

Even to himself his voice sounded strange.

His throat and lips were swollen and dry. As he tried to stand up he tottered—the floor felt detached from everything and he sat down again heavily.

Cutlip Sullivan stood staring, his mouth half open as if for another crow, and his arms half raised. As he took in the details of Blake's attire, a grin of delight creased his scarred and unholy visage. He stepped closer for a better view.

"By cripes! Look what's wid us! Ain't he the purty critter!"

Jack looked down at himself with a faint grin. His evening dress was torn and mud-spattered, and his broad shirt-bosom befouled with blood. He tenderly felt his features, and realized that they must be one mottled, all-embracing bruise.

But wonder grew in him as he stared around. He was in a reeking, half dark wholly filthy cavern of unpainted wood, triangular in shape. Two double rows of littered bunks ran along the two longer sides to the apex. Against the shorter side stood a noisome tin oil lamp which made little light, but much smell.

A floor upon which a self-respecting pig would develop insomnia; and a grinding, smashing din of heavy chain swinging from side to side in huge, rusted iron pipes—these completed Blake's mental picture. And over against him stood Cutlip Sullivan—a mighty ruffian with a split lip that sneered perpetually at the world.

"Sure, I kin tell where ye are," grinned Cutlip, in drunken and ghastly mirth. "'Tis the good ship C. H. Marshall ye're aboard of. Steelfist Charley Marshall's her skipper, an' she's a hellship from Hades!"

Blake stared at his informant, incredulous. Shanghaied? Impossible!

"But how did I come here? Isn't this ship sailing?"

Sullivan roared with amusement.

"Sure she's sailin', me lad! How ye come here I dunno. Mebbe ye paid yer passage, huh? Don't ye like yer cabin 'commo-dations?'"

Shanghaied—in this day of law and order? He, Jack Blake—shanghaied? Then, by the Lord Harry, some one was going to suffer for it!

A storm of rage surged through Blake.

He rose and started toward the only outlet in sight—a rough wooden ladder nailed against the after side of the den, which led through a small, square trap up overhead.

"Better stop where ye are, me lad," advised Cutlip with a drunken leer. "The mate's left us here to git over our jags, mebbe. Bully Forrester ain't the bucko to leave seamen in their bunks if there's any chanct o' using 'em on deck! Wait till yer hauled out, me lad—that'll be quick enough, Heaven knows!"

With which Sullivan raised his own bottle and gurgled.

Overhead, Blake could faintly hear a babel of sounds that spoke eloquently of hard work being done, and of harder driving helping the work. A gray patch of breaking day showed against the square glass in the hatch, crisscrossed by a maze of ropes.

A lifting, roaring shape surged and strained into Blake's sight, then vanished, as the flowing sheeted fore-course snored with wet wind.

Over all rose a strident, powerful voice bawling sturdy sea-oaths in accompaniment to resounding thuds of blows. The voice came nearer, and Cutlip's prophecy was borne out.

A huge bulk filled the hatch. Two thick, sea-booted legs felt for the ladder; and rough and blustering as a deck-sweeping sea itself, Bully Forrester dropped to the fo'c's'le floor.

He stood stooping, bowed arms hanging to his knees, peering into the dim dark hole.

"Yes, sir, I'm goin'" cried Sullivan, making up the ladder nimbly enough before the mate could speak.

Forrester grinned.

"Up, you sojers! Want any help?" Lurching over toward Blake, Bully Forrester stumbled over the prostrate form of the man on the floor.

"What in—who's this cherub?"

A closer scrutiny satisfied the mate that the Bottle Heaver was far from being an able seaman just at present. Accordingly he put his foot to the man's ribs and shoved him beneath the lower bunk.

Standing erect, he looked at Blake.

"Out o' this, you skulker!" A great fist, knotted as an oak root, was drawn back. Then it dropped slowly, the fingers opening and clutching Jack's arm as Forrester leaned forward to look closer.

"Oh, scissors! You're the dude that put the shiner on the skipper, ain't you? Mister, he'll be plumb tickled to see you!"

Blake savagely shook off the clutching hand. A red gale of anger sweeping him, he stepped to the ladder.

"You bet he will!" he made answer grimly. "And if he thinks he can get away—"

"Hold on there!" growled the mate, seizing Blake's flying coat-tails in a firm and determined grip. "Git this in your bean—I'm mate o' this ship! Fo'c's'le dogs say 'sir' to me. Savvy that?"

Blake was too angry for coherent thought. He replied with a wicked upper-cut landing with the full swing of his body.

It caught the mate flush on the chin and hurled him against the bunks with a crash. Then Blake leaped for the deck, reached it after a scramble, and looked around.

Dazed by the sudden change from the fetid air of that fo'c's'le to the fresh, crisp gale that poured upon him from beneath the foot of the foresail, Jack Blake staggered unsteadily to the maze of ropes around the foremast. He clung to them, fully satisfied to recuperate for a moment before seeking the skipper.

Looking over the side and weighing his chances of quitting the ship, he saw the coast stretching in a blue line to port, under a heavy gray pall of morning clouds. To starboard, farther distant, the Farralones spiked out of the slate-colored sea, to spike into the slate-colored sky and vanish.

All around him the outlook was gray and dismal. A dreary drizzle of rain fell incessantly, soaking him to the skin. Gray decks, aglisten with dampness, gray sails booming in the wind overhead; sullen, slouching, gray-faced men toiling in the rainy mist coiling up gray ropes. Ugh!

Blake felt the unsteadiness slowly going out of his legs. Under the stinging fresh breeze his blood began to course again.

Despite the damp dreariness of it all, he

felt that he was now man enough to interview the skipper of this horrible "hell-ship," as Cutlip had termed her. He knew dimly that sailors so termed the ship where men were worked hard.

Letting go the fore-topsail sheet tackles, to which he had clung, Blake took a few steps to try out his walking powers. Bully Forrester, holding his jaw in bewildered fashion, hoisted himself through the hatch, and saw him.

"Skipper's waitin' for you aft, my bully," he snarled. "Just you cut along, now! When Steelfist Charley's through with you, I'll 'tend to anything else you want—if you want any more."

Blake laughed, a trifle shakily. Shanghaied! He had read about it, of course, but it "wasn't done" now, according to books. Anyway, he knew his rights as a citizen.

"If this man Marshall overpowers me, weak as I am," thought Jack, "he can't hold me when we make port. In the meantime, he'll learn that he has Jack Blake aboard, that's sure!"

Quite unconscious of the absurd figure which he presented, Blake marched resolutely along the heaving deck, Forrester following him, and climbed the poop ladder; at the top, Blake made out a vaguely familiar shape standing on the weather side, abreast of the wheel.

All the happenings of the previous evening surged back into his mind at sight of that tremendous figure.

Crisp black curls, glittering eyes—albeit one was now surrounded by a purple ring—long arms, and black gloves; the same wolfish expression which, fastened on that girl, had first drawn Blake's attention—there was no room for doubt. This skipper and the girl's assailant were one and the same person!

With double outrage burning in him, Blake strode toward this grim giant. Under the bushy brows, the glittering eyes seemed more sunken than ever, but glowed with lurid fires. The thin lips drew back from yellow, irregular fangs as Blake planted himself squarely before the skipper.

"Confound you for a pirate!" he broke out furiously. "I demand that you set me ashore at once!"

Steelfist Marshall raised his brows. The corners of his mouth disappeared in wrinkles of hard muscle. He nodded to the mate, who edged up behind Blake.

"Did you ship a waiter for the seamen, Mr. Forrester?" drawled the skipper in slow sarcasm. "I hate dirty waiters. You might's well rig the head pump and wash him off before you bring him aft again."

Bully Forrester grinned appreciation. He sidled alongside Blake, an ebony fid gripped in his big fist.

"I'm no waiter for your hog-pen, and you know it," shot back Blake, his fists clenched. "I'm not one of your filthy sailors, and unless you set me ashore at once, I can promise you a mighty unpleasant voyage—"

"Consarn you, keep your eyes on that compass!" stormed the skipper, whirling on the helmsman, who was grinning at Blake's scarecrow apparel. "Mr. Forrester, are you going to take this flunkie to the pump, or do I have to take him myself?"

Blake, maddened, wasted no more time in talk. He forgot the manifold aches and pains that burned his head and body, and slid close in with a neat shift which frustrated the mate's pleasant intention to trip him.

One fierce lead he landed square on Marshall's sneering mouth—then he was shaken to the heels by a terrific right counter, that made his ribs crack. It was the same bone-crushing right which had beaten him down in the fog by the Custom House.

Blake's seething rage blotted that memory from his mind. He only saw his grinning enemy, the grin demoniacal by reason of the blood his first blow had drawn; flinging overboard all his knowledge of boxing, he rushed in wildly.

Something fell across his legs, a splitting crack descended over his ear, and that terrible right fist of the skipper's thudded to his cheek, cutting the flesh to the bone and hurling him bodily into the poop rail.

After that, all was blank.

Under the application of cold salt water that gushed burstingly from the nozzle of a pump and soaked him thoroughly, Jack Blake came to himself.

The sting of the brine on his cut cheek was maddening. His eyes smarted with the salt. Groaning, he rolled away from the merciless stream.

A watery gleam of daylight touched his swollen face and he struggled into a sitting posture, trying to see out of his puffed and burning eyes. The voice of the mate sounded from somewhere near.

"Dump him below an' pull them rags off

him. One o' you lend him some dungarees. If he kicks, whale him!"

In the foul-smelling fo'c's'le again, Blake groped his way to a bunk and collapsed. His brain was in a chaotic state, and he could pay little heed to what passed around him.

The watch had just come below and breakfast was in progress; the gloomy den was filled with the odors of humanity and bilgewater. One of the men slipped over to Blake and offered him a tin pannikin of steaming coffee.

"Here, matey," he said, not unkindly, "take a swig on this! It'll put some guts into ye, and nex' time ye plaster that cow-son aft I hope ye crack his bloody sky-piece!"

With a muttered word of thanks, Blake took the pannikin. He tasted the scalding stuff, and squirmed inwardly. Coffee! If this was coffee, he had fooled himself all his life!

But it was hot, and reasonably sweetened with black molasses. After a sip or two his inner man responded to its warmth, and he found himself listening to the uncouth noises that passed for table-talk among the half-dozen men. His friend of the coffee, whom the others called Paddy Ryan, seemed to be watching him, and promptly came over again when Blake showed signs of interest in life.

Ryan was a small man, very wrinkled, but with efficiency stamped in his whole bearing. Blake felt instinctively that here was a friend, and one who was able to help him find himself in this new environment.

If Jack Blake had ever been tainted with snobbishness, it was clean wiped out of him by this time. He met Ryan's cheery grin with a faint smile.

"See here, matey," began Paddy, "you ain't one of us, that's plain. But you're here, an' here you'll have to be stoppin' till this ship gets some'eres. So you might as well eat some grub. You ain't goin' to lick Steelfist Charley half starved, me bully boy!"

Once the coffee had put a warm glow beneath his belt, the same thought had come to Blake himself. He realized exactly how matters stood. He knew that if he did not at least make a show of accepting his lot, the entire afterguard of the ship would beat him mercilessly until he did.

Having eaten nothing since the previous evening, he was hungry. Determined to

conquer that skipper with the terrible right, he resolved to store away strength. And finally, being very much of a man, he resolved that he would never sign articles or in any shape give up his rights under the law.

He came to his feet with another faint smile.

"Hold on," exclaimed Ryan, reaching down a bundle from his own bunk, just opposite. "Peel them glad duds, matey! Put 'em in yer bunk—'tis all the beddin' ye get. And you can use these here slops o' mine till you sign on an' do be gettin' some more from the slop-chest."

The "slops" were a pair of dungaree trousers and a jacket of the same stuff; not new, not too clean, but certainly more in keeping with the surroundings than his evening clothes, thought Blake. He put them on grimly, and took a place at the mess kids.

Being too sore to converse, Blake silently gnawed a scrap of hardtack and endeavored to wash it down with drafts of coffee. Then he discovered that, when the coffee became cool enough to drink readily, it also developed a taste which he could not stomach.

Hard though he tried, he found it impossible to down that coffee. He was not at all seasick. As a boy, Blake had made many cruises in his father's yacht, and had become well acquainted with sea life—from the other end of the ship. This was something new, however.

Giving up the effort, he bethought himself to search his pockets. When he left the club, he had had something over a hundred dollars in gold. Now he found himself stripped of money and valuables, save for one ten-dollar gold piece in a vest pocket.

Searching his bunk, he found a cranny in the sheathing and slipped the gold piece into it. Later, he thought, it might come in useful, and it would certainly be confiscated by officers or stolen by his shipmates did it appear in his possession.

From a scuttle-butt beneath the ladder, Blake now obtained a pannikin of water, which proved better than the coffee. While he munched his biscuit with its help, the little hatch was darkened by a descending figure; a square, muscular, bronzed seaman dropped down and took his seat on a vacant sea-chest.

This proved to be the bo'sun, Fancy Harry Lovell, snatching a surreptitious smoke below. His pipe was soon going, and

at once a rumble of growls buzzed from all quarters. Fancy Harry was one man to whom the fo'c's'le might grumble and still know that their complaints would carry no farther.

"Hey, Fancy! What kind o' grub's this?" sang out a big hulk of a man. "Dawg biscuit an' boot leg! I signed for beef, didn't I?"

"How the blazes do you know what you signed for, Keough?" grinned the bo'sun complacently. "It took four men to h'ist you over the rail, and both mates an' me to get you up to the windlass. Shut your head! You'll get used to this grub afore we reach Sydney Heads!"

At this, Blake raised his head and looked steadily at Lovell.

"Sydney, did you say? Are we bound for Sydney?"

"Why, damme if it ain't the dude!" exclaimed Fancy Harry.

To Blake's surprise he extended a hairy paw covered with tattooed stars and anchors.

"Put her thar, matey! I've sailed with Steelfist three year now, allus hoping to see him get what you gave him. Shake!"

Those who had seen Blake's interview with the skipper lost no time in passing the word around. The fo'c's'le shook with deep-sea voices lifted in rude appreciation and incredulous query.

"You the guy what plastered the Ol' Man in the gob?"

"An' give him a shiner?"

"An' smeared his ugly face like a pudden?"

Blake looked from face to face, wondering inwardly. From his own point of view, he had failed ignominiously and wished only to be rid of the subject. Yet, despite his new nickname of "The Dude," he seemed to command respect among these men.

And, suddenly realizing this, he laughed and flung back his shoulders.

"Sure," he nodded response. "And I'm going to do it again, mates. Lovell, when do we get to Sydney?"

goin' to Sydney. Cap'n Marshall goes where he likes, mostly, an' does worse. But you can bet you're booked for six months—hey, where you bound for?"

The bo'sun reached out and clamped strong fingers on Blake, as the latter rose with a grunt.

"Where? I'm going to go see that pirate again—"

"Easy, now easy!" advised Lovell softly. "You ain't got a chance against Steelfist an' the mates, let alone the big Chink! Easy, matey; you're too good a man to see slaughtered by the skipper's steel fist."

Blake halted, staring at the other in surprise.

"What's this about a steel fist?" he queried.

A grin passed around the faces.

"Thought you'd found out," returned the bo'sun. "You been up against it twice. The Old Man's got a steel fist—that's no lie! He lost his right paw through med-dlin' with a cook who could use a cleaver. New he's got a fist of steel, padded to the stump an' laced up his arm to the elbow. What d'ye think he wears them gloves for?"

Blake nodded, and turned to his bunk.

"You're right, bo'sun," he said simply. "I'll wait."

"Yes," said a voice, amid silence from the others. "An' we'll be wid ye, matey!"

A steel hand, eh? Jack Blake remembered those awful right swings, and no longer wondered at how he had gone to sleep under them.

As he sat there staring at the floor he did not realize that more than one of the men followed Lovell's eyes to his face with something like admiration.

Blake was not good to look upon in that moment, but something in him was being slowly brought to the surface—something which had long been hidden under luxurious ease and the lazy enjoyment of wealth. It was not for Jack Blake's eyes to see, however.

Whither was all this leading, he thought? Misery, squalor, brutality! Why had he been pitchforked into it—as ironic reward for championing a girl?

Ah, the girl! What had become of her? Where was she? Into and out of his life had she drifted, and this was the aftermath—his burden.

To these reflections he was left until the afternoon watch, when the skipper summoned him to sign on the articles. Such

CHAPTER III.

THE PUNISHMENT.

FANCY Harry Lovell was a Job's comforter.

"Can't say, matey," he responded slowly, to Blake's query. "Don't know that we're

abject capitulation was quite opposite to his intentions, and it was with hard-set jaw that he faced Steelfist Marshall in the little saloon cabin.

Forrester had the deck. The second mate, Long Rube Bower, a lanky, pock-marked ruffian, who chewed steadily at monstrous quids, stood at the captain's elbow. Near Blake's shoulder hovered the steward, the largest Chinaman he had ever seen.

"What's your name?" snapped Marshall wolfishly.

"You'll discover that at our first port," said Blake steadily, giving look for look. "I'll—"

"You'll sign on as Ordinary Seaman, at ten dollars a month, and you'll keep your watch on deck with the other rats—"

"Confound you," broke in Blake angrily, "I'll do nothing of the kind!"

"I will now read you the articles—" began Marshall.

But the articles were omitted at that interview, for Blake's rage overtopped his caution and he rushed.

As he did so, however, the long arms of the steward encircled him from behind and grappled him in a hug that made arms and ribs crack together. In the same instant the second mate reached out a pair of claws like grappling arms and twisted them in a choking grip about the American's neck.

Flung to the cabin floor, he was wrenched over on his face and felt the iron of handcuffs closing on his wrists. His legs were lashed with small rope. Then Bower rolled him over with an ungentle foot and squirted a stream of tobacco juice into his face.

"Those who won't work won't eat," remarked Captain Marshall. "Mr. Bower, find a soft spot in the chain locker. Don't mishandle him—more than usual. He won't appreciate punishment for assaulting his commander, yet a while. Treat him gently; I'll punish him later."

At a sign from Bower the Chinaman seized the ropes confining Blake's legs and marched up the companionway dragging Blake as he would a sack of coal.

Striking each brass-bound step with his head, while the handcuffs tore the skin from his wrists as they hitched under the steps, Blake soon lost all sense of separate pains. His whole body burned and tingled in one tremendous bruise; his brain went numb under the torture.

Across the poop deck and down the short

ladder—there were six steps, as Blake dimly remembered afterward—then the long stretch of the main deck, dry and hot under the sun which had appeared toward noon. So they came to the fo'c's'le hatch.

"Stand from under!" barked Bower, and dropped his prisoner headlong.

The chain-locker hatch abaft the heel of the bowsprit was lifted, and, with no "stand from under" this time, Blake was bundled through the hole, to fall with a crash on the piled chain cables. Then the hatch was replaced.

Here was torture such as Blake had never in his life dreamed or read of. Painfully squirming until he found the middle of the range of chain, he composed himself in bitterness of spirit and body, amid the deafening clatter of chain-links.

The air was poisonous, his lungs were clogged as though with ashes. With every leeward lean of the ship the bilgewater, compounded from salt water and drainings of the last cargo of raw sugar, erupted a stench that would have turned the stomach of a Hottentot. Each lurch of the vessel flung poor Blake into the tiers of chain with sickening force.

How long he lay here he never knew. He was in a half stupor of abject misery and anguish when the hatch was lifted and a man dropped cautiously beside him.

"Where are ye, matey?" whispered a hoarse voice. "It's me, Paddy Ryan!"

Blake felt kind, groping hands at his head. Ryan's arm came beneath him, lifting his face from the chains.

"Here, take a swig on this, matey—" and Blake felt the neck of a bottle at his lips. "'Tis good stuff, for I did be swipin' it from the stooard's locker. Tokay, ses the label."

Jack Blake managed to swallow a mouthful, chokingly. The fire of the wine crept through his veins and gave stimulance to his outraged body, and restored his nerves to some semblance of strength.

"I dassn't let ye loose," lamented Paddy Ryan, "it'd only make 'em use ye worsen. But here's a hunk o' horse. Chaw on it an' ye'll feel better, mebbe."

For a moment Blake bit hungrily into the piece of salt, hard beef that was poked at his mouth. It softened under his teeth, but he felt too ill to continue.

"You're mighty good, Ryan," he muttered thickly. "How long will they keep me like this?"

"Till you're ready to sign on, I reckon. They'll ask ye in the mornin'. I heard Steelfist say ye'd be gettin' no grub till ye signed."

Paddy folded up his dungaree jumper and placed it beneath Blake's neck. Then he continued:

"Ye'd better sign, matey. Ye can't get even down here, and ye'll starve afore them swine lets up on ye. Steelfist is the mother an' father of Ol' Nick! He's got the big Dutchman an' young Boston triced up by the thumbs to the sheer-pole all the dog watch, 'cause they looked sideways at Long Rube when he dragged ye for'ard."

"But if I sign," objected Blake, his stubborn spirit rising anew, "can't they jail me if I skip the ship?"

"If ye don't sign they'll starve ye. Ain't a man in the crowd as don't want to see ye lam the everlastin' halleluyer out o' them bloody officers, matey! Ses I, you're too good a man to feed the rats in a stinkin' windjammer's chain locker. There's me an' Fancy Harry, an' Cutlip Sullivan, an' big Frank Keough, an' others, as has waited a year and more for the chance to ship together with Steelfist."

"We're goin' to snatch the chanct, while we got it! Wait till we hit the trades, an' our nose is lookin' a bit funder from California! We'll get Marshall an' his bucko mates, an' the yeller ape of a stooard—we'll get 'em, an' ye'll be enjoyin' the sport. Make up your mind to sign, see?"

Paddy returned as he had come, leaving Jack Blake a sadder but wiser man.

Through the long night of horror that followed the shanghaied millionaire bent all his energies to keeping back the groans that rose to his lips. Every link of cable was a red-hot devil gnawing into his flesh; every lee lurch of the ship tumbled the chain about him, until his flesh was raw where the jamming links had nipped it.

Yet, through the night Blake's mind reverted to the face of the girl whom he had seen in the light of the post office doorway—was it ages ago, or only the previous evening?

Why had Steelfist Marshall been following her? The question drummed insistently at his brain. Not because she was a woman, certainly; the snatch of talk which he had overheard proved that Marshall had had more serious purposes in view. Apparently he had tried to force the girl to charter the C. H. Marshall—but why?

Blake fell into an agonized sleep, still wondering.

In the forenoon watch, Bully Forrester shoved his rugged head down the hatch and hailed the captive gruffly.

"Now, my blooming swell, d'you want to sign? Answer sharp!"

"Yes, for God's sake take me out of this!" replied Blake weakly. "I'll sign."

Casting the lashings from his legs, but not removing the wrist irons, Forrester marched Blake up the ladder and aft to the cabin. Stumbling from cramp and weariness, his head swimming and his eyes aching dreadfully, Blake found himself once more facing the wolf-eyed skipper.

"Want me to read the articles?" asked Marshall grimly.

"No," and Blake gripped the table for support. "Give me a pen—let me go."

Thus Jack Blake entered upon his duties as Ordinary Seaman of the full-rigged ship C. H. Marshall. He was placed in the mate's watch, and for the rest of the forenoon went about like a man in a fog, driven to his work.

Eight bells clanged barely in time to save him from utter collapse. He stumbled below, found the bunk where his tattered dress-clothes were stowed, and rolled in to get what relief he could from his bed of sailor's feathers—hard deal plank.

He was asleep before the mess kids arrived from the galley.

This was the last meal that Blake missed for some time, however. He wakened from his heavy sleep greatly refreshed in body and mind; what was better, his head had cooled. He said "sir" to Bully Forrester, and did what was given him to do; behind his grimly clenched lips he kept in mind the one word—wait!

For several days he was left in peace. Thanks to Paddy Ryan, he soon learned his way about the ship's rigging, while he rapidly regained his old clearness of eye and springiness of step.

It was Paddy, too, who shared "whacks" with him; thus, in the days of his novitiate, assuring him a fair share of fat with his beef, and lean with his pork, neither of which he could have wrested alone from the tarry talons of the shellbacks. His first acquaintance, Cutlip Sullivan, developed an undisguised aversion for him.

Thus, as the ship edged southward through an unbroken sea of long, lazy swells, Jack Blake found himself fitting into

his new rôle. And, except when he allowed himself to brood upon his own case, he found much to admire in this new life.

The morning wash down, for example, was a fit opening for any man's day. In the crisp sunrise, when the ocean slowly emerged from its night-robe of black velvet and diamond stars to reveal itself bare and unblushing in shimmery blue, the sparkling gush from the head-pump was a direct challenge to laziness.

Buckets of water flew every way; if a man caught one of them, what matter? He was the better for the wash!

But fine weather in the C. H. Marshall gave her men too many chances for growling, and Blake began to see other things.

He saw "Big Frank" Keough laid on his back on the fore-hatch, hands and feet stretched with small line to each corner; he saw Long Rube Bower throw bucket after bucket of water over the prone figure; he saw the rope, new and hard and already drawn taut, tighten with the repeated wetting and pull Keough four ways at once, until the man screamed in horrible agony.

He saw young Boston, as a penalty for bad steering, hung by the thumbs to the mizzen-stay, his feet eighteen inches from the deck. He saw Steelfist Marshall hang a holystone to each boot "to make him swing regular," until the lad's terrible shrieks had died down to still more terrible groans.

On the second day after picking up the northeast trades, when the ship was clothed from chesstree to dog-vanes with pearly canvas, Blake was summoned by the mate.

"Lay aft here—cap'n wants you. Remember that little matter of assault that ain't been cleared up? Lay aft, you swine—shake a leg, there!"

Blake looked into Forrester's hard, leering eyes. Then he turned toward the cabin, feeling as though a cold hand had gripped on his heart.

He caught a mute glance of helpless entreaty from Paddy Ryan, at the helm, and the warning look restored his self-control. He went below, smoldering fire in his gray eyes, but his long jaw gripped hard in restraint.

Captain Marshall sat at the table in his little saloon, the log-book before him. At his shoulder stood Rube Bower, champing at a great plug. The huge Chinese steward was hovering in the background.

"John Blake," said the skipper, his voice

like chilled steel, "some time ago you attempted a violent and unwarranted assault on your commander. I have here the entry of the circumstance, attested by Mr. Bower. You seemed not to be strong, and were not punished at the time; but I cannot allow such offenses to go unnoticed. As you have seen, my ship is ruled by kind but firm discipline. You will now submit to such punishment as Mr. Bower feels will suit the case. Take him away, Mr. Bower."

This amazing pronouncement drew nothing from Blake save a steady gaze. His gray eyes bit into Marshall's gaze like gimlets; then, without a word, he turned and followed the second mate on deck.

Long Rube turned to a near-by seaman.

"Hey, you! Lay out on the lee mainyard-arm an' take a tail-block with you! Reeve a heavin' line and give me both ends. Lively, now!"

Without a word of warning, he flung himself on Blake, assisted by the Chinese steward. Before the American could get in a blow he was trussed up and lying face down on the deck, his hands lashed to his ankles behind him.

The line was passed down from the yard-arm and one end made fast to Blake's lashed wrists and ankles. Then he heard the second mate sing out; the steward tallied on, and Blake felt himself rising, bumping over the bulwarks, finally to swing clear.

Under him was the heaving sea.

His head struck the lee leach of the mainsail, and he spun like a spider at the end of a line. Then he swung back, felt the line running out—and plunged into the churned-up waters under the lee rail.

The line tautened with the drag of the ship. Blake felt every muscle in his legs, arms and body crack with the strain, as his hollowed back surged against the water. Hands and feet near to bursting with the compress of the line, half suffocated, he was slowly dragged up—up—up until his body touched the block at the end of the yard.

The grim laughter of the mates rang in his ears. With a thrill of horror he saw himself going down at the green water again, and he wanted to scream out. But his lips tightened—and he did not scream, then or afterward.

Five times was this repeated—five times he was hoisted to the block, five times swung down to drag in the water alongside.

"I think that's enough, Mr. Bower," said the cold voice of Marshall.

Blake, half dead, was pulled in. He was jerked to his feet before the skipper, who eyed him with that wolfish snarl which Blake hated with all his heart and soul.

"Take care, Blake, that you don't repeat your fault. I'll have to punish you severely the next time. Go for'ard."

It was three days before he could again stand his watch.

CHAPTER IV.

A PROPOSITION FROM STEELFIST.

DURING those days of agony, it was Paddy Ryan who stole grease from the galley to rub Blake's chafed limbs, and who filched a roast fowl from the pantry through the maindeck port, when Blake could not look at salt beef.

Paddy took his life in his hands to perform these acts of kindness, and Jack Blake was well aware of the fact.

When the pain wore off, Blake recovered rapidly from the punishment. When mealtime came along, he was soon ready to take his place at the grimy mess kids, and to scramble for his share, and many were the rough jests passed over the remaking of the Dude.

With these Blake put up good naturedly, until Cutlip Sullivan put too much of an edge into his japes. Cutlip, in common with some of the others, took for granted that the "Old Man" had effectually smashed the Dude's spirit; and on one occasion allowed his personalities to become altogether too pointed.

The result was astonishing—to Cutlip Sullivan. Blake, very cool and sure of himself, blinded the other man with cutting straight drives; when Cutlip sent his bullet-head driving for the stomach, Blake stepped aside and planted a neat short-arm jolt to the temple.

Cutlip fell with a crash over the hawse-pipe, and stayed there.

"Flap yer wings an' crow!" advised some one.

Blake, untouched, only smiled.

That encounter did him good—made him sure of himself again. Also, it gave him a definite status which admitted him to the circle of deepwatermen.

Thus, when both watches were gathered on the fo'c's'le head in the dog-watches, and Blake was busily picking out the buntlines, clewlines, leachlines, halliards and

braces, in comparison with a list given him by Paddy Ryan for his guidance, Fancy Harry Lovell came and desired his presence with the crowd.

"We'll pull off a stunt to-night, Dude," said the bo'sun quietly. "You won't kick at getting a chanct at Steelfist on level terms, will you?"

"Not a bit," smiled Blake promptly, and Fancy Harry nodded at the steady gray eyes of him. "I'm not crazy any more, though. Let me get him out of reach of the big Chink and the mates—"

"We'll 'tend to *them*," rumbled Big Frank Keough, amid a growl of assent. "If you can fix Steelfist, we'll do the rest!"

Blake glanced around cautiously. Paddy Ryan had the wheel, Marshall and Rube Bower stood together at the poop rail, and the mate was stumping back and forth on the weather side. For a moment Blake forgot what was going on, as he looked up.

With the strong breeze pouring over her starboard quarter, the ship heeled easily with a throbbing hum and boom of canvas and rigging. The towering square-sails, mounting from the great arch of the courses to the quivering royals, were suffused with the tints of mother-o'-pearl by the setting sun over the weather bow.

"Listen, Dude—" the bo'sun's voice called Blake to attention. "You've seen what kind o' sweet angels we got to knuckle under to! You've had their 'entions too, though at that I ain't so sure that they got much change out o' you."

"Now, we signed on for a Sydney voyage. We could lay our course with this wind, but we ain't headin' that way by a handful o' points. Steelfist is up to his tricks, see? Gawd knows where we're goin'!"

"We're not heading for Sydney?" inquired Blake sharply. "Sure?"

The other nodded quietly, one eye on the poop.

"You come along with us at eight bells, and we'll ask the skipper where he's bound for. He'll slam the man that asks him, but he won't get a chanct at his gun—we'll pile onto him an' them sweet mates, an' give 'em holy Hades. How 'bout it?"

"Eh? Mutiny?" The word was not nice to Blake's notion of things. "We—"

"Not by a jugful," dissented Fancy Harry hastily. "Not us! We'll lick Steelfist an' the mates, see—lick the livin' guts out of 'em. We signed on for Sydney, but

they ain't takin' us there, see? If they lick us silly, we lose, o' course. If we lick them, they got to let up on the crew. They can't put us all in irons or they couldn't work ship. See?"

Blake nodded thoughtfully, appreciating this deepwater logic. The officers, in order to work ship, would have to keep hands off the crew. There might be a settling at port, and the officers might not be whipped; those chances would have to be taken.

"I'm with you," he said quietly, realizing that they looked to him to handle the terrible skipper. "Take care of the mates—I'll rough it with Steelfist."

"Good. Hang about the waist—end o' the second dog-watch. Eight bells starts it."

When relieving Paddy Ryan at the helm Blake mentioned the proposed scheme. The Irishman's wrinkled, broad face creased up earnestly.

"Did the bo'sun say we'd do 'em up proper, matey?"

"All hands in it, Paddy."

"Elegant!" grinned Paddy Ryan. "Then don't be makin' no mistake when ye slam the Ol' Man—leave the rest to us!"

When eight bells echoed along the shadowy decks, the sound jumping from sail to sail and dying away to leeward, Blake was waiting beneath the weather poop ladder. At the bell he saw flitting figures swarming aft, and slipped up the ladder. He reached the poop just as a crowd poured up the lee ladder, and started toward the companionway slide.

Then came a sudden hesitation—a silence. The poop was dark, save when the bows soared high, at which times the rising moon sent a patch of light athwart the deck. Blake looked around, saw the men halted by the mizzenmast.

The moon, just above the horizon, cast a widening path of violet and gold, silver-gray and black, straight into the ship's wake. It ruled the lee leaches of the mizzen in glaring lines of luminous light, leaving sharp contrasting shadows stretched from lee-earring to weather-clew.

In that brief pause, the bows rose high on a swell, and moonlight flooded the poop; with it came the skipper, rising through the companionway. His eye caught Blake's figure, and his snarling voice ripped through the night.

"Mr. Bower! You doped—What the—"

Bower, who had not seen the advancing

men, swung around with an oath. Blake paid no heed to him, but marched forward to the skipper, the men crowding behind.

"I want to know where this ship is going, sir," he said quietly, balancing lightly to the swing of the deck, and keeping a wary eye on the skipper's deadly right.

Marshall had left the companionway. Now, seeing the men crowding around, he turned with an oath.

"Forrester! Stooard! Bring your guns!"

In the same breath, he swung straight for Blake's jaw. As he slipped the blow, Blake heard a low growl and saw the lanky figure of Long Rube Bower flailing blows upon a host of foes.

With a deep breath of relief and savage joy, Blake met the skipper's rush. They were on even terms, now that he knew the secret of that steel hand; he kept clear of it carefully, sliding in and out with machine-like rhythm, and shooting in stinging blows that made the skipper grunt.

He dimly heard the rush of the mate and steward up the companionway, and a shot rang out somewhere. Then came a second low growl of maddened men, and the crew closed in on both mates and the big Chinaman.

Cutlip, at the wheel, deserted his post and slipped into the crowd. At that instant Blake saw the motion; also, he saw the gleam of steel in Sullivan's hand. A mad fear surged through him at thought of what would happen once murder was done.

Desperate to get into the mêlée and stop Sullivan, he turned on Marshall with a savage fury at this beast who had made murder possible. A swing of that iron hand whistled over his shoulder; with rigid arm, whirled round by the full weight of his body, Blake brought the edge of his own right hand like lightning to the skipper's throat.

The blow caught Marshall fair on his Adam's apple. One gasp, and the skipper sank to his knees, emitting a weird sound as he half strangled under the blow. His eyes bulged, his mouth gaped like that of a gasping codfish, and he went limp.

Leaving Marshall where he lay, Blake hurled himself into the crowd of struggling men.

The Chinese steward had gone down, insensible under the trampling feet. Long Rube Bower had been tossed over the stern, but was towing by a line. Bully Forrester, backed against the rail, stood

with the bo'sun gripping his revolver hand. His left was locked about the wrist of Cutlip Sullivan; blows were raining upon him, but Forrester hung on grimly.

"See to the ship, bo'sun!" commanded Blake sharply, flinging aside the men.

A thunderous rattle and flapping aloft told of the ship rounding into the wind. Blake gripped Forrester's revolver and tore it away; Fancy Harry leaped to the helm, leaving Blake, Forrester and Cutlip Sullivan locked together.

"Hands to th' braces! Lively, for Gawd's sake!" yelled the bo'sun.

Most of the crowd melted away to secure the ship, for immediate action was imperative. Blake gripped Cutlip's arm.

"Down with that knife, you fool!" he ordered.

Sullivan turned a face twisted with rage and madness.

"Go to Hades!" he snapped back furiously.

Having already secured a half-Nelson on Cutlip's free arm, Blake promptly put it into play. The man went to his knees with a bellow of pain. Instantly Bully Forrester had gripped him by the throat with both hands, a snarling oath on his lips.

Blake stepped back. Again he brought the edge of his palm to the throat of a man—the blow caught Forrester fair and square. With a gurgling gasp the mate slid down, caught at the bulwarks and went limp.

"Get for'ard, Sullivan!" commanded Blake swiftly, and sped the fellow with a blow. Then he leaped to the rail, where Paddy Ryan was hauling in the second mate, and in two moments had Bower spouting water like a picture-book whale.

At a touch, Blake turned to find Fancy Harry at his elbow, anxious of face.

"What's to do, Dude?"

"Suit yourself," and Blake laughed grimly. He patted Forrester's revolver, which he had slipped into his pocket. "Want to put 'em in irons?"

"No—we dassn't mutiny," returned the bo'sun.

Marshall and his mate lay on the deck, staring goggle-eyed at the moon while the men examined them none too gently, wondering at the efficacy of the Dude. Bower was in no shape to fight further, and Fancy Harry called the men around him.

Big Frank Keough was something of a sea-lawyer, and threshed out the situation.

Marshall had attacked Blake wantonly and had struck the first blow. If things were left *in statu quo*, the officers would have learned their lesson; if they were ironed and deprived of command, it was mutiny.

"All right," nodded Blake, taking things in charge. "We'll have no mutiny, of course. We've done what we started to do, so let it end there. Keep an eye on Sullivan, Keough, or he'll use that knife of his. Break up, men."

With the bo'sun he approached Bower.

"Mr. Bower, the ship's in your hands. You are a witness that Cap'n Marshall struck the first blow."

And in this fashion ended the amazing battle on the C. H. Marshall.

Days of uneasiness followed; days when the ocean slid and writhed in long, greasy hillocks and hollows, the ship's wake swirling with oily bubbles. The fo'c's'le was uneasy, for no word came from aft.

Nothing was said by the skipper. No one was triced up and flogged. No mention of the fight was made by either skipper or mates. It was so uncanny, so contrary to custom on this hellship, that the uneasiness in the fo'c's'le grew more painful at each watch.

Jack Blake discovered a still more painful thing, however—he had made no friends forward when he had saved Forrester from the knife of Cutlip Sullivan. In proportion as the men grew more afraid of Marshall's grim, cryptic smile, they regretted not having killed the two mates and mutinied. Even Paddy Ryan evinced a reserve that surprised Blake.

"Paddy, what's the mystery about?" he asked one night. "The ship feels like the roof of a burning powder mill, and you boys seem to think I set it alight!"

"Ain't no mystery, Dude," returned Paddy moodily. "The crowd's markin' time to see what Steelfist's got in his ugly head. What in thunder did you turn around an' queer the game for, Dude? The crowd's sore as a boil!"

Blake's gray eyes narrowed half angrily.

"I stopped murder, Paddy. I joined in for a scrap, and had it. I didn't look for knife-play, and sha'n't assist it without justification."

Ryan's face darkened in disgust, and he spat savagely over the rail.

"Justification—hell! Ain't ye seen enough o' that aboard this hooker? That ain't murder—it's jest fair come-back.

Mark this, Dude—Steelfist is goin' to cut loose, an' if he goes to beat us up or put the bracelets on us, there'll be murder an' ye won't stop it."

"You think he won't let the thing drop?"

"Who—him? Mebbe he will, Dude, mebbe he will. If he does, Gawd help ye! I'm your friend, but there's mighty few more."

Blake did not understand this at all, but came to a fuller comprehension that same evening. And when he did, he saw that Paddy Ryan had been a wise prophet.

All through the first dog-watch, the old hands sniffed at the wind, pointed out the increasing frequency with which the long swells broke into froth, and peered under the sharp of a hand at a low, ragged white vapor down in the western quadrant of the heaving circle of sea. As the skipper appeared on deck after supper, Forrester let out a bellow.

"Muster aft, all hands!"

Muttering, conjecturing, growling doubtfully, the fo'c's'le rats trooped along the main deck and clustered at the break of the poop. Leaning on the rail, the skipper and both mates regarded the seamen keenly.

Blake stood at one side, with Paddy Ryan and the bo'sun.

"Wondering why you haven't all been flaked, I s'pose?" began the steely voice of Marshall, his wolfish eyes resting on Blake. "I'll tell you. It ain't too late yet to put you through the hoops for that piece o' fun you had. But I got better work for fine men o' spirit like you; if you're all of a mind I may forget that night—it's up to you."

With this prelude, Marshall took a turn aft and peeped at the compass. Then he resumed, after a long look ahead.

"Wanted to know where I'm bound for, didn't you, *Mister Blake*?" The sarcasm in his cold voice boded trouble. "That's up to you too, men. Under that cloud ahead is Oahu—Makapuu Point. If you say so, you'll see Honolulu to-morrow. There's a ship in there that's after something which belongs to me. Now, you're all first-class fighting men, ain't you?"

The two mates broke into a hoarse laugh. The men below shifted uneasily.

"If you want to row in with me an' help get what's mine anyway, you can have all the fightin' you want without murderin' your officers. You'll stand a chance o' puttin' a wad of money in your belts to boot."

Marshall paused. Fancy Harry stepped to the front, boldly enough.

"Tell us the hoodle, cap'n. Some o' your games ain't healthy."

The skipper's eyes glinted, and hard wrinkles played about his thin lips.

"My games ain't healthy for the man who queers them, Lovell. You can stay out if you're scared. Because you may get cold feet, I'll not say where we're bound for till we leave Diamond Head behind, but this I will say. There's 'bout half a ton o' coin belonging to me that's sunk in a lagoon not a million miles from here, and I'm after it. It ain't a secret, and others is after it too. That's why I want you bold lads to row in with me."

"What if we don't, sir?" growled Cutlip Sullivan.

"Just this, my bully. There's a fine jail in Honolulu. Get me?"

It was evident that the men "got" him. There was a little rumble of voices, Blake being patently disregarded. Looking up, Blake saw the eyes of the skipper fastened on him with a venomous intensity.

"Well, bullies—what's the answer?"

"We're in, cap'n," cried Sullivan. "But we ain't goin' to pull with the Dude—he's a welsher, he is!"

The skipper slipped a hand into his pocket. Too late, Blake was mindful of the revolver which he had hidden in a cranny of his fo'c's'le bunk along with his gold piece.

"Right and proper!" snapped Marshall. "Lay into him, bullies, and tie him up! The lazarette's open!"

Before Blake quite sensed that trouble was on him, Long Rube Bower had vaulted over the rail and borne him down. Forrester and Sullivan joined in on the instant; Blake was overpowered, crushed to the deck, and trussed up.

Five minutes later he lay in the stuffy little store-room beneath the cabin, the sting of Marshall's kicks still on his ribs.

CHAPTER V.

FOOL OR KNIGHT?

AS at a tremendous distance, Blake heard the ship's bell clang faintly.

Eight bells—then one—two—three—then four bells, ten o'clock at night. Immediately after the last stroke the sounds of shortening sail came down to him, and

he knew that the ship had come up with the land.

Soon, above the squeaking and shrilling of chafing cases and barrels around him, the grind of tiller-tackles and thump of rudder jarred on his ears. Then the rhythmic, sliding motion told him that the ship was hove-to under topsails for the night.

Suddenly he heard voices above him, in the cabin.

"Might's well let up on the Dude, cap'n," rumbled the deep bass of Bully Forrester. "If it hadn't been for him, Rube'd be shark bait and I'd have a knife in my gizzard. Dunno where *you'd* ha' been!"

"Fire it out of your fat head," retorted the skipper icily. "You think I loaded him aboard 'cause o' that black eye? Not me—though it's against my religion to take a shiner off a silk-hat dude without slapping him on the wrist for it. Listen!"

The captain's voice dropped, but the words filtered down to Blake nevertheless.

"That patched t'gallants'l that slipped into port just before we hove-to—you've seen her before? That's the John Foster. What's she doin' here? Why, what we would be doin', only for that meddlin' dude!"

"You've heard about ol' Cap'n Peabody, him what made a pile in the Sydney trade when it was good? Well, his granddaughter has the right dope where his ship was laid up, with every darned cent he made, on the passage home to 'Frisco. No banks for ol' Peabody—he kep' a strong-box in his cabin!"

Forrester broke in with a startled oath. Marshall continued.

"The girl's chartered the Foster to get it. I'd have got the job—had the girl dead to rights that last night in 'Frisco, when the damned Dude chipped in an' spoiled the game. If I let him get away, he'll crab my deal, see? Some o' the Foster's people would find out from him that I was the man who talked to the girl that night—you see, she didn't know me from Adam, an' they won't suspect what we're after."

"Well, what are we after?" growled the mate. "What we puttin' in here for?"

"To get a line on the Foster, you fool! We got to get one of her crew, or the girl herself if we can, an' find out just where she's bound."

"Can't we heave the Dude overboard when we leave?" asked the mate, who had

evidently been appreciative of Blake's action.

"No—I got a notion that we may need to use him first. Leave him lay."

The voices ceased. Every tiny protesting whimper of the ship's frame filled the ensuing silence.

So—this was the game! Blake, staring into the darkness, thrilled to the outline of the story as he pieced it together.

That girl, the rightful owner of her grandfather's mone_, knew the location of the wreck and was after it. Marshall had tried to force her to charter the C. H. Marshall, no doubt with the purpose of obtaining the loot himself. Blake grinned suddenly.

"Things don't work out so badly after all!" he thought with greater cheer than his situation warranted. "The girl herself must be on that other ship—the John Foster!"

Evidently the girl was known by such men as Marshall; if not personally, at least by sight. News that she was chartering a ship must have given the whole thing away, and the wolfish skipper very possibly had laid his plans to kidnap the girl that night.

Blake chuckled again, realizing that he had nipped that little game, but had been kidnaped in her stead.

"And now to see what Steelfist is going to do about it!" he concluded.

All that night he dozed fitfully. With the morning he wakened to find a blue-gray sheen against the single small port-hole, low down; water was swirling against the glass and the ship was heeled over, under way again.

Four years previously, Blake had spent some months at Honolulu with his invalid father, shortly before the latter's death. Thus, when a yellow shaft of sunlight showed in the port-glass, he knew the ship was heading north, that she had passed Diamond Head, and was in harbor.

Simultaneously with the righting of the ship and the roaring clatter of the cable in her hawse-pipe, came voices overhead. Marshall was giving orders.

"Don't bother about furling sail, Mr. Forrester. Keep a short hawse—we may pull out in a hurry. I'm going to snoop around shore. No shore leave unless we have to stay over night. In that case, let the hands take a run. I'm goin' down and interview the Dude."

A moment later Marshall's burly figure

dropped into the lazarette. He planted himself before Blake, eyeing the latter coldly.

"Feel like you could be a good little man now?"

Blake, with the girl's face before his mind's eye, grinned slightly.

"I've had enough strong-arm to last me quite a while, sir," he said quietly.

Marshall eyed him in evident speculation.

"I will say you can fight like a bat out o' hell, Blake. That's why I'm here. Got use for you. What say?"

Twenty-four hours previously Blake would have set forth one and only one demand—to be set ashore, away from this hell-ship. Now, however, he paused reflectively. What about that girl?

"Well, sir," he returned slowly, "I don't quite understand. Are you going to put me ashore?"

To his surprise, the wolfish face darted a nod at him.

"Maybe. Don't know yet. I'm not going to leave you here when we sail, if that's what you mean. But I may have a chance to use you ashore. Feel like cuttin' up any more?"

"No," returned Blake soberly. "I've had my lesson."

Marshall rubbed his stubble of beard.

"Hm! You've signed articles, ain't you?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, mind this: you can't get away from me, not here! Try it, and you'll wish the ropes had broke when Bower towed you overboard. I'm goin' to let you loose, an' mebbe give you a run ashore; if you try to slip away, it'll cost you skin an'—"

"I won't, sir," broke in Blake quickly. "I've signed articles and I'll stay out the cruise. You can trust my word, Captain Marshall; I'm a gentleman—"

"Not aboard this hooker, you ain't! Gentleman—huh! There's only one gent on this craft, remember that—and it's me. Now, what's caused this sudden conversion to a sense of law an' order, my bully?"

Blake caught glinting suspicion in the skipper's gaze, and hastened to remove it.

"You spoke of money, didn't you? If there's a chance to see some scrapping and pull out some money, I agree to stick. Also, as I said, I've had my medicine and know when I'm down."

Marshall turned away with a nod of satisfaction. Half an hour later the Chinese steward appeared and Blake was released.

He found that the skipper had gone

ashore and that Forrester had the deck. With the sole exception of Paddy Ryan the men avoided him pointedly. Like Blake himself, they were somewhat mystified by his release, but for all their hatred they feared him sufficiently to keep out of his way.

Blake's first move was to seek the fore-castle. If it were true that he was to go ashore that night, here was his chance to cable home at least. He found his ten-dollar gold-piece and Forrester's revolver in the sheathing of his bunk, and promptly pocketed the former. Then he lit his pipe and reflected.

"Looks as if Marshall wanted to use me," he considered. "Therefore he'll let up on me in future. Forrester's friendly, and so is Paddy Ryan. The rest are scared out. Since this ship spells deviltry for an unnamed young lady with whom I'd like to be acquainted, I guess I'll stick!"

He went on deck.

The panorama of shipping and harbor, the majestic skyline of eternal mountains behind the town, made no impression on him. He was thinking of that girl's face as he had seen it in the light from the post-office doorway; and he stared moodily over the water at the square-rigged ship lying just beyond the C. H. Marshall.

She was the John Foster—slightly smaller, bluffer of bow, and not so clean of line as the Marshall. The two ships lay within hailing distance of each other; save for an anchor-watch, the deck of the Foster seemed deserted.

Toward noon, however, two things of immediate interest took place. The first came in the shape of a shore boat which drew alongside the Foster's gangway; a girl stepped down the swaying ladder into the boat. Blake, sitting on the fo'c's'le head with Ryan, was galvanized into sudden interest.

The sun touched the girl's face with vivid light, bringing out each feature clear-cut as a cameo; it was The Girl beyond a doubt—the girl for whom Blake had fought on that well-remembered last night in San Francisco!

"What ye starin' at, matey?" asked Paddy Ryan. "Oh, I see—our boat's comin' out, eh? Steelfist ain't in her, though."

Blake forced his eyes away from the shore boat, and turned. Sure enough, the Marshall's boat was coming back, without the skipper. Bower was in her stern.

Plainly, the second mate bore important news. Long Rube came over the side like a monkey, and beckoned Forrester to the rail. The two mates stood in low-voiced conversation for a brief moment, then Bower tumbled down into his boat again and pulled for shore.

To the surprise of Blake, Forrester sent a hail forward for him.

"How much fo'c's'le talk have you heard, Dude?" asked the big mate, when the two stood together at the rail. "You got some idee what we're after?"

"Some," admitted Blake, eyeing the man keenly. "Not much."

"All right. Howard's the skipper o' the John Foster, yonder. He's got a girl aboard. The girl is after the wreck of a ship sunk some'eres between here and Australia. Steelfist is after it too, see? But we don't know where the wreck lays, an' prob'ly the crew o' the Foster does—they'll know where they're bound for, anyhow."

Blake nodded quietly.

"The Ol' Man is goin' to come aboard later. Crew's goin' ashore. You an' me go ashore to-night, see? We got a scheme on what'll work. But you talk turkey right now, Dude. Do you stick with us or not? You're no liar, an' I owe you a good turn anyhow; say yes or no, and either way goes as she lays with me."

"I say yes," returned Blake, his gray eyes steady.

"Good for you, bully! Then don't go ashore with the boys, that's all."

Accordingly, when all the crew save an anchor-watch got shore-leave that afternoon, Jack Blake remained aboard. But he was less quiescent in mind than in body.

"That girl is going to have her hands full," he ruminated, kicking his heels on the fo'c's'le head and idly watching the John Foster. "I've constituted myself her unofficial guardian—hm! I don't know whether I'm a blame fool or a knight errant, but it looks to me as if I'd butted into a chance to be of some use in the world!"

His quiet acquiescence with Forrester's instructions—which must have come from Marshall via Long Rube—had certainly been his best plan of action. Steelfist, in the talk which had come to Blake as he lay in the lazarette, had mentioned the possibility of kidnaping the girl; Forrester had just now hinted at a scheme to get one or more of the Foster's crew aboard.

Blake laughed softly to himself.

"And I don't even know her name, unless it's Peabody! Well, Steelfist Marshall is going to find that I didn't sign articles to kidnap girls, anyhow! That's sure!"

What he could do was by no means clear to his mind. From all he knew, the John Foster had no suspicion of what the rival ship was after, and Steelfist Marshall seemed to be keeping out of sight ashore. Therefore, the girl was without warning, seemingly.

To send her a note was impossible until he could ascertain her name. Even then there were difficulties in the way. His best line of action seemed to be to get word to some one aboard the Foster, warn him, and then await future events. Having determined this much, Blake went below and turned in. He soon fell into a quiet sleep.

He awakened hungrily at four bells, and climbed on deck, to find the town and shipping twinkling with tiny lights, and the sky out past Barber's Point shot with crimson-purple in the sun's afterglow. Barely had he obtained a bite from the galley when a hail from aft apprised him that the skipper was aboard.

"Dude! Lay aft here!"

Jumping to the order, he found Marshall and Forrester by the poop ladder.

"Ain't very chummy with yourself, I s'pose?" began Marshall. "Rouse out the lamp-trimmer to keep the first anchor watch. Then you an' Mr. Forrester go ashore—that is, if you're feelin' fit and able."

There was an edge to the last sentence which caught Blake's attention.

"Quite so, sir," he replied, and went forward.

So he was to be made useful, eh? Blake resolved that if it was a case of kidnaping, he would be useful in more ways than one—especially if the girl was concerned.

To his surprise, Forrester appeared a moment later with an old suit of clothes over his arm, and tossed them to Blake.

"Put 'em on, Dude—you'll look better, mebbe."

"What are we going to do, sir?" asked Blake, obeying with a feeling of satisfaction.

"Have a little scrimmage, me son! You an' me an' Long Rube, an' some o' the rats. The girl I spoke of has gone to a hotel, so the Foster's layin' up for a day, anyhow."

We'll pick up one or two of her men an' slide out, see?"

Blake nodded.

CHAPTER VI.

WITH THE HELP OF THE JAP.

HALF an hour later Jack Blake landed with the mate at the passenger dock. It was four years since he had been here, but the red-roofed houses, the odors of poinciana and algarroba—all seemed the same. And, with the landing, Blake quietly threw off the ship discipline and felt himself a man once more.

"I'm going to the cable office," he said calmly. "Come along, then I'm your man for the evening."

Forrester eyed him narrowly, but contented himself with a curt nod.

At the cable office Blake wrote a brief message to his long-lost friends at the Millionaires' Club, and turned to the mate with a smile. But, over the smile, his gray eyes were steady. He had no intention of breaking that gold piece as yet.

"This is to inform my friends that I'm not dead," he remarked. "Thirty-five cents a word to 'Frisco—pay up!"

"Dude, you ain't lackin' in nerve!" grunted Forrester. "You're playin' square?"

"I am," returned Blake.

For an instant their eyes met. Then Forrester nodded and paid the toll.

"Now," he rejoined, as they turned away, "you an' me goes to the waterfront, Dude. Know how you come to get this chance ashore?"

"No, except that Marshall wants to make use of me. How?"

Forrester dug him in the ribs and chuckled.

"The Ol' Man wouldn't ha' missed this chance himself, not for a farm, only he hurt his iron mitt bad when you sailed into him last time. Hurt his arm, that is. Gawd knows he'll need it worser later on than he does now, too! All you got to do is to scrap as good for us as you did agin us, Dude, an' all's shipshape between us. See?"

Blake nodded, with greater inner satisfaction than he allowed to show.

"You know the Foster crew, then?" he asked.

"Know 'em?" grinned the mate. "You can bet we know 'em—an' they know us, more by token! When we get in port to-

gether hell pops open. The Ol' Man and Howard likes each other 'bout as much as two strange dogs."

This was not so bad, thought Blake, and for more than one reason.

Since he was evidently meant to exert himself at the side of his fo'c's'le comrades, who doubtless knew the terms of his release, here was an excellent chance to re-establish himself in their good graces.

Moreover, he was about to be given an opportunity to see for himself what manner of men were those aboard the Foster—the men entrusted with the business of that girl, whose face so persistently remained before his mind.

"What's the name of the girl you mentioned, Mr. Forrester?" he asked suddenly.

"Peabody—Mary Peabody." The mate shot him a half suspicious glance. "Mebbe you know her, huh?"

"No," laughed Blake. "I never had that pleasure."

"Huh! Well, here we are—now pay 'tention to business, Dude," came the rejoinder, as they turned toward a rambling saloon which was loud with the voices of men.

"Skippers an' mates don't come here much, but whenever the Marshall's in port with the Foster the rule's hove overboard. Means a scrap ten times out o' ten."

The scene was new to Blake, whose previous stay in Honolulu had not gravitated him toward this locality.

From end to end of the long veranda was a reek of strong tobacco and stronger liquor. The sensuous odors of the clean night outside fled before the exhalations and uproar of seamen, who were drinking themselves happily drunk.

Blake caught sight of Ryan, Fancy Harry and a few more scattered members of the Marshall's crew, then Forrester had turned him toward a far corner of the place.

Here, at one of the low tables, sat three men, who were regarded with watchful looks by the rest of the crowd. One of the three was Long Rube Bower, his pock-marked face flushed with liquor, and his eyes blazing with no love for his companions.

One of these was a red-haired, lithe, hatchet-faced seaman in heavy blue clothes, who regarded Bower with tolerant contempt; a fighting man this, and dangerous, as Blake quickly decided. Then his eyes went to the third man—and he started.

A rugged fellow, deeply tanned, who sat

at the table with his huge shoulders bent forward and his two fists closed, and who was glaring steadily at Bower like a great mastiff awaiting the moment to leap—what hint of familiarity lay in that massive visage? Blake's thoughts leaped back to a fog-shrouded night—and in a flash he had it.

Here was the man whom he had seen with the girl at the Custom House on that momentous evening!

"Who's that with Bower?" he asked in a low voice, threading his way through the maze of tables beside Forrester.

"Them?" the mate chuckled. "Why, Slick Howard o' the Foster, o' course! That red-headed merman with him is Bingham, his mate."

Blake had no further time for reflection. Events moved fast.

As the two entered a hush had swept over the crowd; then the Marshalls had sent up a roar at sight of Blake following to the officers' table. Men of both parties, who had hitherto contented themselves with exchanging compliments in general, began to edge in toward the center of the room.

Whatever reason Bully Forrester might have for inviting a fo'c's'le hand to drink in company with Howard and Bingham, that action could have but one result. Every man present knew it, save Blake himself, and Blake was quite conversant with the general state of affairs.

Also, he noted that the faces of Howard and Bingham were, if possible, even less conducive to confidence than those of Marshall and his officers. It was with a thrill of alarm that he faced the men to whom Mary Peabody had entrusted herself.

Then they had reached the officers' table.

"Take your fo'c's'le rat away from me, Forrester. He smells a little worse than you do."

Captain Howard's voice was cold and steady; he sat massively and unmoving, save that his right hand had closed on a bottle-neck. The hatchet-faced mate grinned sourly and shoved back his chair.

Long Rube Bower gathered his long legs beneath him and rested both hands on the table, ready to spring. Over the long, smoke-dim veranda closed down a sudden hush that was strained and tense.

"Friend o' mine, Cap'n Howard," warned Forrester slowly. "Good enough for any company I keep. Dude, what'll you have?"

For a moment Blake looked into How-

ard's small, slow-moving, biting eyes, and realized as he did so that here was a foe worthy to meet Steelfist Marshall. Then his clean-lined features broke into a smile, and his gray eyes struck down at Howard as his quiet voice bit through the hush.

"I'll take a glass of milk, thanks."

The long veranda leaped into riot.

As Howard flung his bottle, Bower knocked it away and flung over the table. Before the bottle struck the floor every seaman in the place was engaged, mobbing around the four smashing officers.

Blake found himself in the thick of a weaving maze of hairy fists flailing on him from every side. All his skill and agility were called into play to keep his feet as the Fosters rushed him; he fought away, Fancy Harry bored into the group, and the general mêlée separated into individual combats.

Finding himself left with two bull-like Sou'easters to handle, Blake managed them in a cool-headed, scientific fashion. A wild yell swept up, which told him that his shipmates had restored him to place again.

"Lookut the Dude! Wow!"

"Plaster 'em, Dude!" roared Fancy Harry, who, table-leg in hand, was mowing a swath through the hurly-burly.

Smiling, Blake put the second Sou'easter to sleep with a rocking left, and whirled to give his aid to Forrester. The four officers were slugging toe to toe, however; at the same instant there pealed up a wild yell that rose shrilly over the fracas.

"Police! Clear out!"

A chair flew up and smashed the electric light cluster in a crackle of glass, and the *lanai* was plunged in darkness.

Blake felt himself borne back by the furious stampede, crashed into the flimsy rail of the veranda and went down to earth with a splintering crash. Two figure stumbled over him, and he caught a hurried word almost in his ear.

"Meet me at Waikiki—Jap place!"

It was Howard's voice, and as the figures vanished Blake caught Bingham's reply.

"Right-o! I'll be there—"

Squirming to his feet Blake dashed headlong into the shrubbery and gained the street. He had a glimpse of white-clad policemen, and slipped away cautiously.

"What are Howard and Bingham doing at the Japanese Inn?" he thought, knowing the resort well. "I guess I'd better beat them to it and see what I can see. If they prove to be the right sort I'll tip 'em off

about Marshall; otherwise—well, that can take care of itself.”

Ten minutes later, having added shirt and collar to his rumpled attire, he boarded a Waikiki street-car and was on the way to Diamond Head.

That brief, sharp encounter had done more than merely stimulate Jack Blake. It had showed him the all-important fact that “Slick” Howard and his mate were of much the same type as Marshall.

Not seamen of the old school, as he had hoped to find them; not bluff, honest, straight-away men who could look Marshall’s kind in the eye and bid them go elsewhere; but men hard of heart, heavy of fist, who had rather spend a year after loot than a month after honest pay.

Blake’s idea in seeking the Japanese Inn was quite definite. He wished to observe, the skipper and mate of the John Foster without being seen himself, and, if possible, to make certain whether or not Mary Peabody had placed herself in unsafe hands.

He wanted very badly to glean some information which might help him to arrive at a decision regarding his own course. While cogitating how to do so, he turned in at the wooden gate of the inn and stepped up to the veranda, acutely conscious that his hand-me-downs were very different from the correct garb in which he had formerly visited this resort, four years previously.

“Misser Blek! Misser Blek!”

Blake turned, to find a grinning Jap bowing and scraping in delight. After a puzzled moment he recognized the boy as the waiter who had always served him and his father, and whom his father’s tips had always brought to prompt service.

“Tani!” he exclaimed quickly. To himself he added: “I guess dad has left me a better legacy than he ever knew!”

A glance showed him that they were alone, most of the visitors being on the seaward veranda. He turned to the boy with a smile.

“Tani, you know Captain Howard?”

“I know, Misser Blek,” returned Tani, his wooden features immobile again. “He come here bimeby.”

“Cap’n Howard number one fella, Tani?”

The wooden face hardly showed expression—it might be said that the grain beneath showed for an instant.

“Number one fella gentleman, here. Number one fella dam pirate no here!”

Blake grinned, determined to seize this rope flung him by fate.

“I guess you’ve got him sized up all right, Tani. What time is he coming?”

“Him come one minute, two minute, any time coming.”

“Here?”

“No *lanai*—catch room, in back-side. Have got ready.”

Blake took out his gold piece and weighed it meditatively. A glitter shone in the beady eyes of Tani, who, perhaps, made a shrewd guess at what was coming.

“Tani, my father was good friend to you, eh?”

“I know, Misser Blek. What can do?”

“I want to hear what Cap’n Howard talks about. He mustn’t see me. Can do?”

Tani bobbed his head.

“Can do. Come—I show you.”

Blake followed the boy around through the shrubbery and they paused beneath a tree of Golden Shower, whose clusters of yellow bells brushed the side of the inn like a breath of incense. A limb of the tree ran across a cane-screened window, from which a shaded light glowed softly.

“S’pose you sit along tree. I make table by window inside. Can do?” suggested Tani hopefully. “Too much flower—no can see inside.”

Blake looked up through the tree and saw that even the stars were hidden by the mass of foliage.

“Fine, Tani! Bring me a chair and some sweet syrup. Here—change this for me.”

He handed Tani the gold piece and drew out his pipe. In half a moment the boy padded back with a chair, a little glass of syrup and the change. Keeping out enough to pay his way back to town, Blake returned the rest of the coins to the waiter.

“Good—run along now, and I’ll not forget you next time I come.”

Grinning, Tani vanished. Blake settled into his chair and filled his pipe. A sigh of satisfaction broke from him as the tobacco bit into his lungs. He was well content to have purchased this hour of peace by a few blows; afterward, he could go back to the ship and decide upon his course of action, as regarded Mary Peabody.

Like one deep note sounded the rumble of voices from the seaward veranda, drowned at moments by the slap of wavelets on the near-by beach; the laughter of women, the tinkle of glasses and the droning, murmurous boom of the surf on the

outer reef—these things and a thousand others formed a symphony of the tropical night.

Ten minutes passed, and Blake was beginning to wonder whether Tani might not have earned his tip by a bit of Japanese trickery—when he heard the gruff voice of Captain Howard on the veranda. There was a scrape of chairs, and then the soft voice of Tani drifted in gentle persistence.

Another scrape of chairs, grumbling voices that were silenced as screen doors closed on the speakers, and Blake heard heavy footsteps resounding in the room beside which he sat.

The screen of the window was pulled up, a match flared dimly through the leafy foliage and Blake caught the voice of Howard above him.

"Dunno's I like this stuffy inside, Bingham! Safer, though. Keep that window open so's we can hear any one snoopin' around."

"Huh!" rejoined another voice, evidently that of the mate. "You must be nervous since you shipped that skirt! Who in thunder's goin' to nose around here?"

Blake sat immobile. A door opened; there was a tinkle of glasses and the clink of money. The door closed again.

"I ain't partial to women aboard ship," said Howard, between gulps. "Dunno what she wants to come for. Won't make no differ, when all's said an' done! She won't trust me, hey?"

"No wonder," chuckled Bingham evilly. "But she stands to lose any way she plays it. She took her suit-case off to the Moana mighty quick, didn't she? S'pose she thought the atmosphere was more refined—yah! Got her orders yet?"

"That's what I come here for," grunted Howard. "Expectin' them any minute."

Blake quivered with anger.

So, then, he had been right in his suspicions! Howard was playing the very game which Marshall had mapped out for himself!

It occurred to him that his best move was to slip off to the Moana Hotel and warn Mary Peabody at once, then return to the Marshall and see the thing through, as he had promised. He started out of his chair, then halted abruptly.

He had best remain and find what those "orders" were, now that he was here. Also, if he were to play off Marshall against Howard, as he dimly planned, he might

pick up something of service to his own skipper. A few moments would make no difference, and the Moana Hotel was not far away.

"Wish she'd ha' give me the position of her grand-daddy's mazeuma," remarked Howard irritably. "Would ha' saved a heap o' trouble. She figures we can't sail without her, 'cause she'll hang on to the dope till we get off the steamer tracks. If it wasn't for that, I'd pull out o' here. I don't feel chipper over that swine, Steelfist Marshall, hoverin' in my neighborhood."

At this Blake smiled grimly. Then the girl had not been entirely deceived after all, but was hanging on to her information! This explained a good many things.

"Huh?" queried Bingham. "Ain't the Marshall in on a reg'lar trip?"

"Like hell!" returned the other. "There's no such thing as a reg'lar trip with Steelfist, as you'd ought to know. Don't I see trouble every time his condemned hooker drops her mudhook alongside? He took out Sydney papers same day I cleared from 'Frisco; what's he doin' here? Bet he's the guy what tried to force Miss Peabody to charter him night afore we sailed!"

"Say, you've hit it there!" exclaimed Bingham, with a slow oath of appreciation. "But how in blazes can he know where to go if you don't know yourself?"

"He don't. But the Marshall can whip the sheets off the Foster when it comes to sailing, see? We can't stop him pullin' out after us, can we? Not that I give two darns for him and his iron mitt! When we drop anchor over that hulk, I'll have the coin out of her in spite of the skirt, Steelfist Charley Marshall, or the devil himself! Only we could ha' done without the extra trouble."

The two fell silent.

Jack Blake began to regret having so easily passed his word to Marshall and to Forrester. It began to look very much as though Mary Peabody, alone on the Foster, would have stern need of a friend; could he have left Marshall here and shipped with Howard, he might yet be of some service.

On the other hand, after getting his warning, the girl might charter another ship altogether, and he was bound by his word to finish the voyage on the Marshall.

"I'll wait for those orders," he told himself, "then I'll hit for the Moana Hotel, tell her what's up, and go find Forrester. That—"

He paused, as a knock sounded from the room above.

"Who's that?" growled Howard.

"Me, Tani. Got message from Miss Peabody. Boy bring him."

The door was opened and closed. After a short interval of silence there was a crash as Howard brought down his fist on the table.

"What d'ye know about this, Bingham! She's gone aboard already; says she wants to sail by midnight! Bet she got a sight o' Steelfist somewheres an' recognized him—"

But Blake heard no more. Slipping from his chair he was already striding toward the entrance of the grounds, with blank dismay in his heart. Mary Peabody would never get that warning now!

CHAPTER VII.

THE FINN AND THE SUIT-CASE.

AS his car sped toward town Blake's lips clenched in grim resolve.

"Missed my chance," he thought bitterly. "I daren't send a note aboard the Foster—she'd never get it in the world! No, I've got to get hold of Forrester and the men, then let Marshall know that Howard is going to sail at midnight. If I advance Marshall's game, I advance my own. Then—my time will come later."

Since Marshall had expected to remain till next day with the John Foster, Blake knew that he would find the mates and the crew still ashore. So, leaving the car at the edge of town, he located a boat-boy on the waterfront who gave him the names of some houses of call for officers.

Blake started on his rounds hastily, for it was now drawing on toward midnight.

"There's good in all evil, just the same," he consoled himself. "My alacrity in this matter will convince Steelfist that I'm playing square with him. And at the finish—by thunder, I'll find some way to counter him and Howard together!"

At his second stopping place he obtained news of the two mates. Five minutes later he ran them to earth in a private room of a saloon.

"Hello, Dude!" exclaimed Forrester. "Thought you had been put away. You can cert'nly scrap—eh, Rube?"

Long Rube condescended to lend a word of assent. Both men were plain blue water ruffians when it came to handling a crew;

and, to a great extent, they had to be such. Yet neither of them was the man to withhold appreciation, ashore, of the qualities which at sea made Blake dangerous to them.

"Did you get any of them?" asked Blake quietly.

"Nary one—the police broke in too quick."

"I suppose you know that the Foster sails at midnight?"

The two men stared at him in startled surmise. Having nothing to conceal in the story, Blake told exactly what he had overheard at the Japanese inn.

At the first words Bower would have dashed off to round up the men, but Forrester held him back, bidding Blake give the whole yarn.

"Lord!" broke out the angry second mate. "We been sittin' here gammin' while Howard's heavin' short—"

"Run along, then," commanded Forrester with an oath. "Round up the crowd, an' get busy."

Bower disappeared on the run. The mate, more leisurely, started toward the landing-place with Blake.

"We can sail rings around the Foster," said Forrester slowly. "But when the Ol' Man saw the girl take her gear ashore to the hotel he nat'rally thought the Foster was good for a couple o' days anyhow. So the crew's ashore an' hell's to pay. Are any of the Foster's crew ashore?"

"Very likely," nodded Blake. "Howard only got his sailing orders when I was there, a half-hour ago. It—"

"Then meet me at the landin' stage—keep under cover—I'll be back—"

Whirling abruptly, Forrester departed at a lumbering run, leaving Blake to continue by himself. Once at the landing-place Blake settled down with his pipe in the shadow of some piled kegs, where he could keep a watch on all things.

The place seemed absolutely deserted, however. Five minutes later a number of native boatmen appeared hastily; urging them on was Forrester, who left them and came over to join Blake, puffing and dripping with sweat.

"Holy Gawd, if it works!" he panted.

"What?" asked Blake nonchalantly.

"Wait an' see. I—listen to that! Listen to that! Ain't it hell? There's Howard gettin' his hook, blast him! Ain't none of his cursed crowd ashore?"

Out from the harbor the metallic clank of windlass pawls shattered the night, and sharp commands snapped out from the darkness. The mate cursed fluently.

The sounds ceased, however, and as the riding-lights of the two ships remained steady, Forrester's curses ceased also.

Howard's ship was evidently waiting for something or somebody. When her anchor was broken out her riding-light would come down, and side-lights would show in her fore-rigging. So her crew must still be ashore, in part.

"Marshall ahoy!" rang out a thick voice near the kegs. "Vot vas—"

"Rube's gettin' 'em," snapped the mate, leaping up.

A dark figure stumbled down toward the water, and disclosed itself as that same Dutchman who had been hung by the thumbs to the sheerpole one morning for commiserating Blake's tortures.

The Dutchman was drunk, and Forrester ran him to a waiting native, who tossed him aboard and set out for the ships. Barely had the mate rejoined Blake, when a second figure appeared, with a grunting hail.

"Yon Foster! Hey, Yon Foster boat!"

Without a word Forrester leaped forward, caught the speaker, and swung him toward the light of the dock lamps. Then even Jack Blake allowed a grin to escape him.

The man carried a small leather suit-case. He was dressed as only a Finn fore-mast hand knows how to dress for shore leave—hard felt hat, gray-and-red neck muffler, and shrieking hand-me-down suit, pressed by rolling into a ball and jamming into a tarpaulin bag. He teetered on high heeled shoes that would have taxed the ability of a cowboy to the limit.

"Hey, you!" demanded Forrester roughly. "Where ye bound? What ye doin' with that suit-case?"

"I bring from Waikiki, sir," stammered the Finn, nervously. "I tek to Miss Pebbody in Yon Foster—she give me big call down for come late. I go 'board—"

"Gawd's own luck!" breathed the mate, hoarsely.

Like a cat he flung himself bodily upon the seaman. The Finn had taken warning and ducked away; only to trip over his high heels, however, and the next instant Forrester was on him.

"Ow!"

The agonized cry broke from the Finn as the mate's heavy boot landed in his ribs. He crashed headlong to the planking. There came a thud of boots stumbling down the wharf, and Forrester whirled on Blake with a sudden snarl.

"What you standin' there for like a fool spike? Don't, stare questions—jump! Get them men into the boats, you idiot!"

Blake obeyed. He realized instantly that this Finn, having been sent to the hotel for the girl's suit-case, must be a man to be trusted, either by Howard or by the girl herself. Therefore he would be a good source of information.

Three men appeared, dazed with drink, and Blake ran them down to the waiting native boats. Then came Paddy Ryan, and after him Long Rube Bower, cursing like a fiend.

"Ain't another man in sight," he cried profanely. "The rest must ha' gone up to the Punch Bowl an' fallen in—"

"Cutlip Sullivan and young Boston went up to Mongovan's place, sir," spoke up Paddy Ryan. "Big Frank Keough's drunk in that bar by the Institute—"

"Go get 'em," blazed out Forrester, turning savagely on the second mate. "An' stay till ye do get 'em, see? Come on, Dude—pile in!"

Blake jumped into the boat with Paddy Ryan, the mate, and the senseless Finn, and they were rowed out to the ship. On the way, they passed the Foster, and in a whisper Forrester explained his strategy.

"I got them native boys to bring out everybody to the Marshall—see? If any o' the Foster's crowd is ashore, they come to us."

"They're probably all aboard," returned Blake. "Howard must have been waiting for this Finn."

"He'll wait till hell freezes over then!"

They found Steelfist Charley stalking the deck in fuming rage. To avoid the imminent outburst of wrath, Bully Forrester promptly brought forward his prisoner and explained what had taken place.

Meantime, Blake secured the girl's suit-case and smuggled it into the fo'c's'le. To think of that suit-case being pawed over by Marshall and Forrester revolted him. Besides, it might contain private information which would be of service to him.

"Guess I'm some angel guardian, eh," he thought with a chuckle.

He dropped the suit-case into the chain-

locker where he, as ordinary seaman, would be the first man sent when getting up anchor. Then he returned on deck to find a different atmosphere.

Steelfist seemed to have sloughed his rage. His grim face was a mesh of grinning wrinkles, and he glared over the rail at the Foster's riding-light as if enjoying the impatience that must be consuming the rival skipper at the non-arrival of the Finn.

Almost together, eight bells clanged out from the two ships. But still the John Foster floated idly, her topsails hanging in the buntlines, and her jib-boom a raffle of loosed headsails. From the Marshall Blake could make out the glimmer of Bingham's lantern on the fo'c's'le-head, and as her riding-light swung to her heave it cast vagrant gleams on the men at the windlass brakes.

One bell, and two bells, and a shore boat pulled alongside with more of the Marshall's errant crew. Still the Foster swung to her shortened cable, and Steelfist chuckled more audibly at each passing moment.

Boat after boat sheered alongside, until all the crew but Cutlip Sullivan, young Boston, and Big Frank Keough were accounted for. Long Rube was working hard, and as the Foster showed no signs of life Marshall sent the men below to sleep or to stand by for an early call.

Blake went with the rest, certain now that Howard would not slip away from Steelfist Marshall that night at least. He had just got asleep when he was roused up by a sharp dig in the ribs.

"Hey, Dude! Wake up, you grampus—this is the mate talkin' to you!"

"Eh? Yes, sir!" Blake swung up at once.

"Where's that suit-case the Finn had?"

Blake stared sleepily, with an excellent air of surprise. The dim fo'c's'le resounded with full-bodied snores.

"The Finn had it, sir," he replied. "He must have dropped it when you piled on him."

"You fat-headed sojer, o' course he did!" Forrester heaved up with an air of disgust. "If he don't say nothin' about it, you needn't, see? The Ol' Man would be sore as blazes—no use goin' back to look for it now."

"All right, sir," responded Blake, and rolled over to sleep with an inward chuckle.

At five in the morning the hands were turned out, and the usual ship's business

was put in progress. Opposite, the John Foster swung to her anchor still. Blake found that the three seamen were still missing, and so was Long Rube Bower.

Steelfist had not yet appeared on deck, but at six o'clock the mate came forward after getting his coffee and opened the sail room where the hapless Finn had been confined during the night.

Blake was plying the squeegee when Forrester passed, and felt a wave of loathing as the mate flung him a grin of cold cruelty.

"The Finn's goin' to talk now," said Forrester, leering. "Steelfist's got somethin' aft that'll cure his dumbness!"

"You won't get much out of him, sir," returned Blake. "What there was to know was probably in that suit-case. You don't suppose the Dutchman knows anything about it?" he added, suddenly.

The mate paused at the locker door.

"Cripes, yes!" he exclaimed. "I'll go see that big Dutchman."

He walked back along the waist to where the Dutchman was working. Blake swiftly slipped to the door of the locker.

"Hey, you Finn!" he said quickly. "If you can stick it out, don't tell them anything! I've got the suit-case safe—I'm Miss Peabody's friend, savvy?"

The Finn stared wildly at him. He was lashed fast on top of a pile of sails, and his eyes were red with lack of sleep. He seemed to take heart at Blake's words.

"Tank ju," he muttered. "It don't mek no differ. If Miss Peabody know I not come, she can sail quick."

"I'll attend to that."

Blake nodded, one eye on the mate. He resumed his work, speaking over his shoulder the while.

"When you cross the poop I'll hail the Foster. You throw up your arms or make a stir—they'll see you. Maybe Steelfist will forget you in his hurry to follow. Savvy that?"

"Ya," returned the Finn.

Blake, satisfied that he had set matters going well, walked away to put up his squeegee as the mate returned with a shake of the head.

Forrester marched the luckless Finn aft, having unbound him. Blake hurried from the bo'sun's locker and followed, while the rest of the crew gathered to watch proceedings.

As the captive reached the poop, Blake let out a laughing hail.

"What's the matter, John Foster? Afraid to hoist anchor for fear you'll catch the gale that blew away last week?"

The remark served its purpose of attracting attention. As Forrester turned with an oath and a snarl to "Shut up!" the Finn flung out his arms.

Instantly a shout arose from the John Foster that startled the seabirds into flight—a shout of rage and vengeance. Before that shout died away the Foster's topsail-yards were jerked aloft to an improvised chanty which evoked a howl of rage from the Marshall.

"Oh, Steelfist's dead an' gone below—
Oh, we say so—an' we hopes so;
Oh, Steelfist's dead an' he'll go below;
Oh, poor—ol'—man!"

"He's deader'n the bolt on the fo'c'sle door—
Oh, we say so—an' we hopes so;
Oh, he'll never knock us dead no more—
Oh, poor—ol'—man!"

The John Foster was off.

CHAPTER VIII.

FACING A CRISIS.

ROUSED by the shouts, Steelfist Marshall was on deck in two jumps.

He took in the position at once when the clank-clank rattled from the Foster's windlass, and her fore-yards were braced aback to pay her off as the anchor broke out.

"What's started the blame fool off?" he cried furiously. Then, catching sight of Forrester at the rail, "Man the windlass, you pop-eyed owl! Call all hands! Where's Bower?"

Forrester was taken aback. He stared at the Foster with mouth agape, then his eyes went to the Finn and back to Blake, as if to piece together the parts of a puzzle.

"What're you staring at, you dumb image?" roared the furious skipper. "Where's Bower? Wake up!"

"He went ashore at daylight," growled Forrester. "Them three men ain't showed up yet."

At this, Marshall broke into a storm of curses. Now a shout from the Foster announced the breaking-out of the anchor, and her head paid off under the thrust of her backed fore-yards.

A man ran aloft on each mast to loose the top-gallant sails, and her fore-yards came around handily to a runaway chorus, every

line of which reached the ears of the raging Marshall as the Foster gathered way and stood across his stern.

"Oh, what shall he do with his drunken sailors,
What shall he do with his drunken sailors,
What shall he do with his drunken sailors,
Early in the morning!"

"Way, hay, there she rises—
Way, hay, there she rises!
Hay! *Whoop!* There she rises,
Early in the morning!"

Sail after sail was sheeted home aboard the John Foster, and the liquid music of her bow wave burred along her black sides as she rapidly drew nearer, leaning gracefully to the fresh air of the morning.

At her weather rail stood Captain Howard, bull-like and massive, his red features alight with leering triumph. He leaned out, holding on by the mizzen-royal backstay, and directed a hail at the Marshall.

"Stung, ain't you?" he barked, his deep voice ringing clear. "The Finn ain't no consequence, long's we know where he is. Take him an' welcome! So long, Cap'n Marshall! Hope your long an' useless greaser finds them drunken sailors for you afore night!"

Marshall leaped to the rail with a curse, and shook his steel fist at the passing ship.

"You keep away and crack on, blast you!" he roared. "I'll find what I want from the Finn, and I'll beat your bloody ol' hooker yet!"

"Finn don't know anything," came the derisive answer, as the John Foster pointed up for the reef entrance.

At this instant a shout rang down from aloft. Paddy Ryan had been working on a broken ratline half-way up the main rigging. The Foster had run so close that he could get a clear view of her decks.

"Hey, Cap'n Marshall!" he shouted down, flinging out an arm toward the other ship. "Git yer glasses! See if that ain't Cutlip Sullivan roped up in the waist of her!"

Marshall leaped for the mizzen-rigging, glasses in hand, and Blake lost no time in jumping with the rest for a view. The Foster showed her stern, and the men were all but hidden, but a roar of rage broke from the Marshall.

Steelfist slid down the topmast backstay and turned on the mate.

"Who's missing, Forrester? They got three men roped up, there!"

"Young Boston, Keough, an' Sullivan, sir," returned the mate quickly.

"Where in perdition is that long crab of a Bower?" broke out the wrathful skipper. "Bo'sun! You go get him—and by the Lord, if you liquor up I'll flay you! Slip ashore an' hustle him. Tell him if he ain't aboard in half an hour I'll break him an' put him to work in the galley! If you come back without him, I'll flake you!"

Fancy Harry beckoned one of the passing native boats, and was gone.

"Man that windlass!" bawled Steelfist, in a fury. "Loose them tops'ls!"

As the men leaped about their work, Marshall eyed the Finn, who stood where Forrester had left him. The fellow looked grotesque in his sadly battered finery, and his pale, watery blue eyes blinked fearfully at the skipper.

"What's your name?" whipped out Marshall suddenly.

"Ole Kafban, sir."

"Mr. Forrester! Pass me some small line!"

As he took the line, Steelfist cast one eye at the rigging, then seemed to alter his intention. Striding to the shrinking figure of Ole Kafban, he merely tied one end of the line to one wrist, taking a turn around his own left hand with the other end. Thus he held the Finn at the end of a fathom of tether, like a dog on the leash.

"Ole Kafban, did you know my three men had been carried aboard the Foster?" he demanded, fastening his glittering eyes on the seaman.

"Naw, sir—"

The line tightened, and Ole flung up his free arm in terror.

"Naw, sir! I vas 'shore all day. Dond't—Dond't!"

"Don't get scared, son," Marshall laughed grimly. "My men all love me, I'm so gentle!"

He twisted another turn of the line about his wrist, drawing the Finn a foot closer to him.

"I don't believe you did know about those men, Ole." Marshall's face held the wolfish look that augured an outburst of passion. "But you can tell where the Foster's bound for, can't you now?"

The line tightened, almost imperceptibly.

"Ay dond't knaw, sir, Ay dond't knaw! Capen Howard dond't knaw himself—oh, Fader!"

Marshall suddenly jerked on the line.

The Finn lurched toward him, stumbling, and the steel fist crunched viciously into the side of the helpless man. With a low groan, Ole Kafban slid to his knees and went down in a limp heap, fainting more from terror than from the sickening blow.

What else the skipper had in store for the Finn was postponed by the arrival of Fancy Harry Lovell and the second mate.

"Dump this rat into the fo'c's'le, Mr. Forrester," snapped Marshall. "He'll sign on when we're away, or we'll waste a length of canvas on him. Are you hove short?"

"Cable's 'most up an' down, sir. Break out in two minutes."

The senseless Finn was dropped into the fo'c's'le. As Bower came over the side he sought refuge from the skipper's evident wrath in his duties, and took his station for getting under way. The John Foster, heeling to the strong trade wind, was like a fairy toy in the distance.

"Heave away for'ard!" sang out Marshall, his eye on the diminishing speck.

"Heave-away," echoed Forrester, and the men walked the capstan around in silence, save for the jar and surge of the cable links.

"Anchor's apeak, sir!" cried the mate.

"Up with the tops'ls," came the curt order. "All three together, now! Lively men, lively!"

Divided into three groups, with the mates, the cook, and even the Chinese steward lending a hand, the men at the halliards sorely missed the beef of the three absent men.

The foretopsail was mastheaded first. While the hands ran to give a pull on the main, Forrester directed Blake to bring the Finn from the fo'c's'le. Blake slipped down to find Ole Kafban sitting on the floor, shivering in fear.

"We're short-handed, Ole. Slip up and bear a hand, and maybe Steelfist will go light on you. We're after the Foster. Remember now, I'm your friend and the friend of Miss Peabody. Chase along with you!"

Somewhat reassured, Ole lumbered up the ladder. Blake, remembering that he had not been sent to stow chain, darted to the chain locker hatch.

He found the chain below piled in lumps, just as it had fallen from the windlass, and it was plain that no one had been spared from the capstan bars to stow it. Therefore, the suit-case was safe for the time, buried under a ton of chain.

Jumping for the deck again, Blake joined

the Finn and they both tailed on to the lee fore-brace as the ship canted away on the port tack and started her stern chase.

Once outside the harbor the C. H. Marshall was not slow to feel the hurl of the brisk quartering wind that whistled and twanged in her taut rigging. As by degrees she felt the added impulse of royals and topgallantsails, it became evident that she was holding the Foster, and Steelfist Marshall grew into calmer mood.

While they worked together, Blake made shift to tell the Finn about the situation in which Mary Peabody had got herself. Ole's pale blue eyes lighted with a dog-like affection at the girl's name, and Blake understood that the man's simple soul was wholly devoted.

"You be good feller," said the Finn, looking hard into Blake's steady eyes. "S'pose maybe Capen Marshall hit me some more?"

"If he does, I'll do my best for you, Ole. But there's no harm in telling all you know, because the only way in which we can help Miss Peabody is to reach the position of the wreck ourselves. Unless we do so, Howard will have the game all to himself," said Blake.

For a moment Ole studied over this statement, then nodded solemnly.

"Sure. You be good feller. Right! Ay know yoost so much—Miss Peabody say to sail nine hoonderd mile sout'. After dat, she give position. Capen Howard don't know no more."

Cogitating over this information, Blake determined to take it aft at once. Such procedure might save the Finn future torture, and would certainly better his own standing with the skipper. Blake knew well enough that his only means of helping Mary Peabody lay in gaining the confidence of Steelfist Marshall.

Accordingly, Blake took himself aft and saluted the scowling skipper cheerfully. Steelfist was already conversant with all that had taken place ashore.

"Cap'n Marshall, I've been talking to that Finn and I find that he knows as much as Cap'n Howard himself. The John Foster is to sail nine hundred miles south, to get out of steamer lanes; then Miss Peabody gives the actual position of the wreck and the—"

"Dude, look out how you try your funny wheezes on me!" broke in Steelfist, his black curls dancing in the wind. "Why in thunder did he tell you this? He wouldn't tell me a blasted word."

Blake smiled evenly. His gray eyes were cold, and held Steelfist Marshall's gaze intently.

"Your methods were somewhat—er—terrifying, sir," he said quietly. "I simply asked him, and he told me. You seemed to have scared him to death."

"Hm!" grunted the other. "Think he's on the level, do you? If he's lying he'll make shark bait!"

"Yes, I believe him, sir. If I may make a suggestion, he wouldn't be a bad one to sign on in place of Sullivan. He's a good seaman, and might help us a lot."

Marshall's glittering eyes studied Blake's clean, hard face for a moment.

"I like bullies o' your sort, Dude," he replied unexpectedly. "You've done some good work for us, and I'm glad you've found your senses. Send the Finn aft. I'll sign him on, and hold you responsible for his conduct. How's that?"

"Fine, sir," nodded Blake. "He seems to like me, and I'll agree to manage him."

So Ole Kafban went aft and was duly signed on, and Jack Blake considered that he had done a good day's work for himself and Mary Peabody.

His position had been secured, so far as the officers were concerned. With his shipmates, also, the fracas at Honolulu had helped him; he was no longer avoided, and seemed to have regained his old standing to some extent. Paddy Ryan had been shifted into the other watch, so that Blake saw little of him now.

Before the sun lipped the western sea-line that evening the C. H. Marshall had drawn up on the Foster sufficiently to prove her superior speed, and Steelfist's scowl had been left behind with the wake.

That Howard was uncomfortable was plainly evident. Every device to pinch speed out of his ship, even to the rigging of makeshift studding-sails, was tried; but the Marshall under plain sail easily held her place, and Steelfist smiled in contempt when his rival's makeshifts were taken in for the night.

Through the night continued the chase, an arc-light of a moon pouring its brilliance over the deep-breathing ocean, and limning the John Foster in shining patches of radiant silver.

Toward morning, however, the moon failed. The three hours before dawning were black as Erebus, and when at last the blazing sun cupped over the horizon to an-

nounce another day, the sea was bare as a desert. The John Foster had vanished.

Long Rube Bower had the watch. The moment he satisfied himself that he had not lost his eyesight, that the Foster was actually gone, he dived below and aroused Steelfist Marshall.

The skipper was on deck in his pajamas, sweeping the sea with his binoculars before Forrester's bulk loomed in the companion-way. Nothing was in sight. Steelfist sprang to the mizzen-royal-yard, swept the horizon vainly, then slid down the backstay with a sounding curse.

"Get that Finn!" he snarled, his face suffused with evil blood. At his tone the business of washing decks was suspended promptly.

Ole was below, and Blake dropped his broom and slid down to forestall Long Rube, heartsick at thought of the simple Finn. He gripped Ole and had the man awake instantly.

"Wake up—they're coming for you! Do you know anything more about the Foster's port? Tell me sharp, now!"

"Ay tolt ju ever'ting Ay know," asserted Ole, panic in his pale eyes.

"Is there anything in the suit-case?" persisted Blake, hearing the steps of Bower at the hatch.

"Mabbe—mabbe—Ay dond't t'ink so," whimpered the Finn.

Blake dived forward into the recess of the ship's eyes, as Bower came down and hurled himself on Ole. When the Finn had been dragged bodily upward, Blake cautiously lifted the cabin-locker hatch and dropped to the cables below.

"If I don't find something to save that fellow, Steelfist will murder him!" he thought, grim-lipped.

Working feverishly, yet with a modicum of noise, he tore aside tier after tier of the heavy chain until he came to a crushed, shapeless brown mass which had once been a suit-case. The lock had survived, but the case itself had been burst apart in every seam.

A shriek of agony pealed along the deck above, echoing under the straining foresail and carrying with startling clarity to Blake. Desperately he tossed up the mass of things to the fo'c's'le above, got them into his bunk, and searched for he knew not what.

Then he felt a sudden thrill—amid the soft garments, whose touch brought a tinge of red to his cheeks, he found a note-book.

Another scream rang out. Blake ran to the hatch and turned over the pages of the note-book.

They seemed blank; then, written in pencil at the back of the cover, he found what he wanted. "Southwest by south, 650 miles."

The scrawl meant nothing clear to him, yet he felt that here lay the clue to the whole thing. At the same time, it was nothing that he could use to save Ole. The few words told him nothing.

Were the fact known that he had hidden the suit-case, his own fate would be swift and bitter. He caught up his hidden revolver and pocketed it.

Another and prolonged scream from the after deck sent him to his bunk again. Hurriedly heaping the scattered garments to one end, he threw his other things over them in effectual concealment. Then he jumped to the ladder.

"I'll have to face him down," he muttered, "anger-muscles" playing in his cheeks as his jaw clenched! "The low-lived murderers! I'm getting tired of knuckling under to a set of rough-necks! By the Lord, I'll face Marshall down, and if there's any scrapping done, I'll shoot him and take command of the cursed ship myself!"

All of which held more raving than sense. But, as Blake swung up to the deck and glanced aft, a slow curse of fervid loathing broke from him at sight of the scene being enacted on the poop.

Then he started aft, hand on his revolver.

CHAPTER IX.

TAKING BIG CHANCES.

ALL hands stood watching the poop, with frightened, angry faces; Fancy Harry Lovell was cursing in a low voice. Even the hardened mates were not grinning as they usually did, at the skipper's pleasantries.

In the weather mizzen rigging hung Ole Kafban, spread-eagled. His wrists were lashed, one to the forward, one to the after shrouds; his ankles, stretched wide apart, were lashed fast to the hauling-part of the weather main brace, where it led inboard. He was stripped to the waist.

Around his hanging, agonized figure stepped Steelfist Marshall, his terrible right arm poised, coolly picking the spots where

he could inflict the greatest agony with the least chance of rendering his victim insensible.

The Finn's back and sides were streaked with livid weals and purple bruises, and blood was trickling over his skin. The skipper was speaking to him in a voice repellent in its icy ferocity; the Finn's groans were mingled with moaned denials and abject pleas for mercy.

Blake's absence from the deck had passed unnoted. His gray eyes like ice, he now walked up to the skipper; his even, passionless voice seemed to bite into Marshall as he spoke.

"Captain Marshall, this man has told you all he knows. You'll beat no more out of him."

Marshall turned to him with an oath, and drew back his right arm. But Blake's steady eyes and unmirthful smile halted him.

"Better not try it, sir," went on the American, hearing a mutter of applause from the crew behind him, "unless you want to be jumped. The men won't stand this kind of thing—and neither will I. Leave that Finn alone. I guaranteed his good faith, and I repeat it."

"Huh?" growled Marshall venomously. "What you know 'bout him?"

"No more than you. Mind, I told you that I'd stick, and so I will; so will the men. But we won't stick for this kind of business, cap'n. The Foster's course was simply altered to fool you."

Perhaps Marshall noted that Blake's hand was resting in his jacket-pocket. His scowling glance went to the mates, then swept over the sullen faces of the men at the foot of the ladder.

"Take the rat for'ard," he growled, staring down the men one by one and then fetching his eyes to Blake. "You, Dude—what you grinnin' about?"

"I'd like to have a word with you in private, sir," smiled Blake.

Marshall eyed him half suspiciously.

"Come aft in an hour. I want to get dressed an' have a cup o' coffee 'thout any stinkin' fo'c's'le rats around."

Having thus saved his blustering dignity, Steelfist tramped below.

In the fo'c's'le Blake ministered to the luckless Finn's bruises in a way that brought the dog-like expression back into Ole's watery eyes. The rest of the watch were rousing out for breakfast and had no

time or breath to waste, so that Ole and Blake were left severely alone.

When the frightened, hysterical man was quieted down Blake sat talking with him for a little. He questioned Ole about the note-book and directions, but found that the Finn knew absolutely nothing.

The man's affection for Mary Peabody was self-evident, however. The girl had saved him from some manner of brutality aboard the Foster, and Ole spoke of her with tears in his watery blue eyes.

At eight bells Blake went on deck. The morning was perfect. Tiny whitecaps played at the summits of the long, even swells; a graceful roll of foamy sea curled away from the sharp stem of the ship; from horizon to zenith the blazing blue sky was flecked with woolly puffs of cloud hurrying athwart the ship's course.

Every yard of canvas bellied full from yards and stays, snoring with a deep thrum under the wind, thrusting the C. H. Marshall fair on her southerly course. Blake was not long in getting a biuff hail from Forrester, telling him that the Old Man wanted him in the cabin.

He found Marshall sitting at his table, the Chinaman hovering near.

"Captain Marshall," said Blake quietly, having long since decided on the story to be told, "you may remember that I was at Waikiki just before we sailed, and heard Captain Howard and Bingham talking over their plans?"

"Bully Forrester told me all that," grunted the skipper. "What's up?"

"I'm not sure myself, sir," smiled Blake. "But here are some figures which may mean something to you: 650 miles, south-west by south. They may, of course, mean nothing; I'm sorry I didn't speak of them before, however."

Marshall frowned, and sat for a moment in silence. Then, gruffly bidding the steward leave the cabin, he went to a locker and unrolled a large chart on the table.

"Huh!" he remarked. "Nothin' on the chart there, Dude. Leastways not that course an' distance from Honolulu. Sure you ain't forgot nothin' more?"

"That's all I know," nodded Blake, with a swift sense of disappointment.

After all, there had been nothing to indicate that the pencil-scrawl referred to the great secret. He had possibly jumped at conclusions in a most unwarranted manner—

"Hold on!" broke out the skipper, with an oath. "Nine hundred south—"

Bending over the chart once more, Marshall caught up a pencil and scribbled down a calculation. He verified it, then flung down the pencil with an exclamation of amazed delight.

"By Jupiter! Shouldn't wonder if you've hit it after all, Dude! Here's the point nine hundred miles south o' Honolulu—see? Figuring your six-fifty sou'-west by south, we'd fetch Fulai!"

Blake thrilled to the words. The skipper worked another brief calculation and leaped up.

"Dude, we'll take the chance! The course from here is sou'-sou'-west, 'bout twelve hundred mile. If it's the right dope, and it certainly looks it, then by glory we'll lick the stern off that blasted Howard by a week!"

Marshall sprang on deck and gave out the new course. Blake went forward again, and in an hour every man aboard was conversant with the news. Only then did Jack Blake fully realize that he had not only Steelfist Marshall to cope with, but Marshall's crew as well.

From the skipper down to the steward, every man aboard was filled with thoughts of loot. Each watch yarned of treasure-trove and "easy money"; Fancy Harry and the rest of the older hands told of Bully Hayes and other famous characters by the hour. The only foremast hand who went about his work and said nothing was Ole Kafban.

Blake had cherished hopes of appealing to Paddy Ryan's better nature and Celtic chivalry, but soon saw that the little Irishman was as mad as the rest about the object of the cruise. Reluctantly, Blake drew aside and stood alone, with the Finn for a weak anchor; he was none so certain of his own status that he dared endanger the position which he had gained.

Steelfist Marshall was taking a long chance on heading for Fulai—a small coral island well off the steam routes. If all went well, they would reach the island in less than a week. Whether or not this was the spot for which the John Foster was aiming was another question.

From the Finn Blake learned that the state of affairs aboard the Foster was much the same as on the Marshall—officers and crew bent on the one object of getting the treasure. That Mary Peabody was in any

present danger was most unlikely. The exact location of the wreck was probably her own secret, and would be so until the island was reached.

After that, thought Blake grimly, the event would lie largely with himself and with the finger of Fate.

The days flew swiftly, while the C. H. Marshall boomed along steadily under the trades. Then, on the sixth morning, all lingering doubt and anxiety was settled when the lookout aloft reported the patched topgallant-sail of the John Foster in sight abeam, on a course convergent with that of the Marshall.

For the first time in days, Steelfist's rugged face gleamed in a smile void of ferocity. He urged the utmost from his ship and by nightfall he was close up with, and to windward of, the John Foster.

Howard, too, was driving for all he was worth; it must have become apparent that the C. H. Marshall was bound straight for the same port, and that she had the heels of him.

All through the night the Marshall edged down on the Foster. Toward dawn the two ships were within hailing distance, and through megaphones of canvas there began an exchange of sarcasm, compliment and personality which made Blake trust that Mary Peabody was keeping well out of ear-shot.

All hands were on deck, hanging to the rail and enjoying the exchange between Howard and Steelfist; and, every sail drawing a rapful, the Marshall slowly forged ahead of her rival.

Then came a sudden yell from Forrester, in the bows.

"Look out! By Gawd, she's tackin' into us!"

No one had noticed how perilously close the two ships were; and, with his extra large crew, Captain Howard tacked his ship like a schooner. When Forrester's yell pealed up, she was gathering way and bearing down with a smother of bow wave, aiming fair at the bows of the Marshall.

"Weather braces! Right yer hellum, ye fool!"

Steelfist followed his deep shout by leaping himself to the lee cro'-jack brace. His action blanched the faces of the oldest-seaman aboard, and even Blake understood the desperate chance being taken.

With the Foster foaming nearer, an ominous shape spitting forth jeering yells and

curses, the Marshall's yards were swung until she was caught flat aback. Every sail thundered back on the masts, and the whole ship groaned with the tremendous strain of it.

For sixty tense seconds Jack Blake held his breath, gazing fearfully aloft, praying that the gear would hold. The odds were even that the masts would be wrenched out of her, that she would go under stern first, or that she would hold.

But Steelfist knew his ship, and his judgment proved sound. The ship staggered, stopped and then slowly forged astern. The John Foster shot across her bows so close that a man might have leaped from ship to ship.

That was "Slick" Howard's last chance, for the Marshall gathered way again before he could think of tacking, and in half an hour was far beyond his reach. Yet this had been enough to show Jack Blake that he was playing a game with desperate men, with Hatred sitting at each elbow, and human life flung into the discard.

"By the Lord," he thought, gazing after the dim splotch of the Foster's canvas, "this is a man's play! And when I sit into the game I'll play it like a man—for the sake of the little girl over yonder!"

At daybreak came the end of the first round, when a blue mass ahead resolved itself into an island, tiny, reef-encircled, yet slumbrously beautiful—a verdure-clad hump jutting from the sea—Fulai.

Steelfist himself mounted to the fore-yard to scan the reef for an opening, with the John Foster converging on the island abeam. The entrance appeared, and although the Foster held on past it Steelfist kept to his course, shouting profanely that he had been fooled enough by "Slick" Howard. He shortened sail, none the less.

Too late the skipper saw the Foster shoot through the reef a mile farther on and slide into the glassy calmness of a lagoon. A moment later Steelfist let out a deep shout and came sliding to the deck.

"Wear, Forrester, wear!" he roared frantically.

Braces were hastily manned; the mizzen staysails rattled down, and the outer and flying jibs that had been taken in were sent flying up the stays again.

The ship's head paid off, away from the half-visible froth of surf under her fore-foot, but it was too late. A tremulous shudder ran through the vessel; there came a gentle

grating, and the C. H. Marshall quietly rested on a hidden spur of reef.

"Fooled again, by Heaven!" quoth Forrester.

CHAPTER X.

PREPARING FOR CRIME.

STEELFIST MARSHALL was far too wise an old seadog to abandon the chase merely because his keel was wedged between two fangs of a reef.

All fore-and-aft canvas was hauled down; courses, topgallant-sails and royals were furled, and topsails clewed up and left hanging in the buntlines. Then the hatches were raised, and all hands were set to work heaving the rock ballast on deck.

Luckily the ship had touched on a rising tide, what breeze there was blew off-shore, and the sounding-rod showed that the well was bone dry. At high water it seemed likely that the Marshall would float clear, unless the wind chopped around to drive her further into the reef.

While toiling at the winch and hoisting heavy slings of ballast Blake was quite able to appreciate the peaceful loveliness of Fulai. And never had he imagined that Nature could so prodigally endow one spot, even in the rich South Seas, with such redundant charms.

Near the northern headland and nestling under its shelter was a trim white thatched bungalow, which overlooked the lagoon. Behind, and stretching over the crest, was the foliage of banana groves, showing that some cultivation at least was to be found here.

Bully Forrester was in charge of the ballast gang. Blake noted that the mate kept gazing shoreward with a queer expression on his rugged, brutal face—an expression that was half conjecture, half reminiscence.

The spilling of a sling of rock, with its consequent damage to the deck, failed to draw more than a quick glance from Forrester; this absence of hot reprisal was so unusual that it attracted Blake's attention to the man.

Even the lowering of the Foster's boats, which indicated a zealous opening of operations, and the volley of oaths from Steelfist, aft, seemed to move the mate but little. Blake, tipping the slings as they came up into a pile on an old tarpaulin, eyed For-

rester keenly and became convinced that the mate was no stranger to the place.

While in plain sight, the Foster was a good mile away and Blake could not make out any sign of Mary Peabody, as he had half hoped to do. So, as he worked, he directed a quiet question at the mate.

"Know this island, Mr. Forrester?"

The other turned to him with a nod, his rugged features puzzled.

"Know it? You've said it, Dude! Used to know it in the old days—but now it's got me wonderin'."

Blake tipped up a sack with a rattle of rock.

"Yes? Has it changed, then?"

"Some," and a reminiscent chuckle broke from Forrester. "It's near twenty year since I was here—that was in the good days, when a man could load up with black ivory an' get away with it."

"Eh? Black ivory?" Blake looked at him with a swift thought. "Are there natives here, then?"

"Uh-huh. This used to be a good port o' call, Dude. Them fellows were husky scrappers, worth three Kanakas as sailors, fighters, or yam hoers. But when ol' John Wicliff started in to teach 'em things out'n a Boston Bible—bluey! Gin-slingin' traders, glass-bead fakers, an' poor innocent black-birders couldn't scratch a blasted oat here after he begun!"

It was not hard to guess something of Bully Forrester's history from those few words. The mate was a product of the old tough days, and had probably served his apprenticeship to black-birders and the semi-piratical schooner fleets which had been long since cleared from the face of the waters.

"It doesn't look like a very savage place," laughed Blake. "Who's your friend John Wicliff? The same who translated the Bible?"

"I s'pose so," nodded the mate seriously. "I was wonderin' if he was still here or if he'd got chewed up 'fore he converted them niggers. From the looks o' that house, same's as it was twenty year back, he must ha' stuck. Don't see no spears among them lantanas, neither."

"Banana groves mean white men," observed Blake. "So the natives here were a bad lot, I gather?"

"When ol' Wicliff come here, this little island was choke full o' yellin', rippin', savages who'd murder a crew for gin, Dude.

The gospel-shark was, forty year old when he come, so if he's still here he must be an ol' bird by now. Jupiter! He come with no gun, no square-face, nothin' but a fat Bible."

"He must have been an interesting person," and Blake scanned the apparently deserted island with more interest. "Think he's still around?"

"Mebbe. He's either converted the niggers into Kingdom Come, or they've scoffed him up and them bushes are hoppin' with spears, waitin' for us to land. I'm willin' that Howard should solve the mystery."

The rival skipper seemed to be in no great hurry to get ashore, however. His boats were crawling about the pellucid waters like huge beetles, a man in the bow of each boat taking soundings with a hand lead.

Howard himself directed operations, standing on the Foster's fo'c's'le-head. Mary Peabody was not in evidence.

Now, however, Blake had no further time for observation. The tide was nearing high water mark and the C. H. Marshall had to be floated.

Steelfist himself took the deck, and set all three topsails, with yards braced aback. During the next fifteen minutes all hands slaved hard; ballast was jettisoned, and more ballast was shifted aft in the effort to move the ship.

The backstays curved slack with the strain, while head-stays thrummed in sharp protest; then, with twenty ton of rock gone to buttress the reef, the Marshall started astern with a scraping, shivering, grinding slide, and slowly floated clear.

Half an hour later she sailed through the reef entrance, amid a chorused greeting of sarcasm and jeers from Howard's men that set Steelfist's face blacker than a thundercloud. Without reply, the skipper steered her to an anchorage ahead of the Foster, in a spot which had not yet been reached by the latter's prowling boats.

Howard's attitude was not long left in doubt. Barely had the cable rust settled on the Marshall's compressor than the rival skipper's boat set forth on an evident visit. Steelfist stood at the rail, watching with a leering scowl, his left hand resting in his jacket pocket.

Ten fathom distant the boat lay to her oars. Howard stood up in the stern-sheets and shook his fist, his massive features working with rage and his entire bull-like

appearance eloquent of an overpowering fury.

"You better get your hook an' pull out o' here, Marshall!" he roared. "The first man o' your blasted crowd to set foot ashore gets plugged—you hear me! And if I get my hands on that consarned Finn, I'll toast him over a punk fire. Pull out, my bucko, pull out!"

Steelfist Marshall seemed quite at his ease. He laughed—a grating laugh like the rattle of bones.

"Have you got your title to the island with you, Mr. Slick Howard?" he taunted. "When did you buy Fulai, eh? Sorry, but I got a matter o' business here—private business, it is. As for pluggin', you start somethin'. I ain't a bit scared long's you don't come no closer."

His air of quiet railleury passed, and he suddenly leaned forward over the rail, his voice as rage-smitten as that of Howard.

"I'll pull out when I'm good an' ready, see? Now pull out yourself, you—" and he poured a flood of vile abuse at Howard. Every word was an insult, every phase stung like vitriol.

Howard was beyond further speech; his massive features went black with passion. Whipping a pistol from his pocket, he fired on the draw; a tiny crackle of white splinters broke from the rail beside Marshall's steel fist.

The report was echoed instantly, however, by the crack of an automatic in the left hand of Marshall. Howard's weapon flew from his hand and splashed in to the sea, while Steelfist grinned.

"I'll learn you to aim straight in a few more lessons, Mr. Howard," he jeered.

"Devil sink you!" roared Howard, dancing in the stern-sheets and hanging on to his numbed hand. "It's fight, is it? By jings, you'll have fight, blast you!"

"Chase him off, Mr. Forrester," and Steelfist turned forward. "You can spare a bit more of that ballast, I think."

Forrester nodded. With a whoop of joy the crew caught the idea and flung themselves on the pile of ballast. In five seconds rock was filling the air and all but filling Howard's boat as well.

From her gunwales zipped splinters, and an oarblade split, knocking the loom of the long ash up to the chin of the oarsman and tumbling him among his mates. Howard plumped down in his seat, trying to guard himself with his coat, and cursing his men

fluently as they made frantic efforts to pull away.

And after them pealed a roar of merriment and defiance from the Marshall that wakened echoes from the headlands and the jungle-massed hill of the island.

Since war had thus been formally declared, Steelfist now saw to it that his ship was put in shape to guard against any move from Howard.

With the mates driving all hands, the sails were furled harbor fashion, while another anchor was carried out astern and springs were bent to both cables. Then the ballast was ranged in heaps under the bulwarks, where it would prove efficient ammunition in the event of any attack from the Foster's boats.

Blake was the last man to remain aloft. On his way down he lingered for a moment in the maintop, from which altitude he gained a clear view of the deck of the Foster.

As he hung there watching, he saw a small, weazened Chinaman, evidently the steward, emerge from the companionway and cross to the gangway. The steward was bent nearly double under the weight of a small trunk.

Following the steward came a figure which drew an exclamation from Blake.

"The girl! And by George—she must be going ashore!"

So, evidently, she was, since she disappeared by the ladder over the side of the Foster opposite Blake. Howard was not in sight. The red-thatched Bingham stood lolling by the rail, watching the girl with half a sneer.

A great relief surged through Blake, for he had feared a dozen things. The Foster seemed glad to be rid of Mary Peabody, he observed with no small satisfaction. Possibly their plan had been to lift the treasure and then maroon the girl on the island; but whatever the reason, they seemed to offer no opposition to her leaving.

A moment later Blake caught sight of the boat, shooting out from the Foster toward the white hungalow at the north end of the lagoon. Probably, he thought, the girl knew something of the former missionary and intended to occupy the house; then so much the better!

His eyes followed the slight, white-draped figure in the stern of the boat, wistfully enough. Ships, men, island, the very atmosphere of brooding strife—all vanished

to Jack Blake as he stood there in the maintop, staring after the boat until his eyes ached with the sun-glare on the glassy water. Before him was her face, piquant, sweet, womanly—

"Aloft there!" rose the raucous bellow of Long Rube Bower. "Want yer bed sent up, Dude?"

Blake slid to the deck and went below.

After dinner the mate resurrected an ancient diving-suit, and set to work patching leaky pipes. Long into the afternoon the clean air was polluted by the reek of rubber solution.

The air tubes were bent, battered, worn-out and thoroughly untrustworthy. Blake wondered what man would venture his life under water in such an outfit, and said as much to Forrester. The mate grinned evilly.

"You wait an' see, Dude!" and Forrester applied a foot-square patch to a torn knee of the diving-suit. "The skipper's got a pleasant way with him, when he wants a thing done, and it ain't easy to refuse, see? I guess it's your job, too."

"You've got another guess coming, then," said Blake quietly, danger in his gray eyes.

He had seen the Foster's boat return without the girl, and knew that Mary Peabody was stopping ashore. Therefore, his own problem was to get ashore also and join forces.

"Listen here, Dude," went on Forrester, softly. "I kind o' favor you—an' you know why. Don't you go to rile up the skipper. If he says to dive, you dive; I'll handle the pumps, an' you'll get a square deal, see?"

With that, the mate strode away. Thereafter, as though to make up for his warning, he kept Blake busy on one job after another, until, in the heel of the day, a few natives were descried on the beach opposite the ships. The skipper instantly ordered the cutter dropped over.

Blake ran to the falls, hoping that here was his chance to get ashore and possibly to slip into the jungle and get clear. But in this he was foiled, and by Steelfist Marshall himself.

"You stay aboard," ordered the skipper, laying his hand on Blake's knee, as the latter was climbing over the rail. "Quit work, Dude, an' rest up. I'm goin' to try for a couple o' niggers to dive for me. If they can't be got, you'll try your hand at it in the mornin'."

"Not in that rotten suit," and Blake, steadily met Marshall's eyes. "It's rank murder, Captain Marshall! I signed articles as seaman—"

"You go look at them articles," grinned the skipper, only the merest hint of menace in his face. "You're the one man I can trust, Dude, an' you'll go down. Get me?"

Disgusted, Blake went forward, lit his pipe, and sat on the knighthead, moodily staring shoreward. He saw Marshall step on the beach, while the cutter hauled off a few lengths and lay to; then the skipper vanished in the shadow of the jungle into which the natives had darted.

It was plain that the girl had played into the hands of both parties by going ashore; for, with the treasure once salvaged, either Howard or Marshall would seize it and depart, leaving her marooned and out of their way. None the less, she was for the present safe, and presumably with the missionary, Wicliff.

Disturbed by the remembrance of Marshall's grin, Blake slipped down to the fore-castle, and, for the first time, perused the copy of the articles tacked to the bulkhead under the ladder. It was a mere sheet of thick paper, eighteen inches by eleven, printed in red; but it constituted the law of the ship, beyond all appeal.

Office of the U. S. Commissioner for the port of San Francisco.

It is agreed between the Master and seamen, or mariners, of the C. H. Marshall, of which Charles Marshall is at present Master, or whoever shall go for Master, now bound from the port of San Francisco to Sydney and intermediate ports. * * *

"Hm!" grunted Blake, who had been joined by Fancy Harry Lovell. "Looks as if this phraseology was designed to get the readers mixed up, doesn't it?"

"Well, I dunno 'bout that frasey part of her," rejoined the bo'sun doubtfully, "but I never seen no articles that was easy to understand. The readin' matter is worse mixed up than a law-shark's writin'."

At the scale of provisions, Blake smiled; the low standard set by the law was followed by a list of substitutes left to the discretion of the master. He read aloud the clause enjoining the crew to be orderly, faithful, honest and sober, and a hoarse guffaw from the bunks answered him.

Another guffaw greeted the clause forbidding flogging and corporal punishment

under dire penalties; but now, at the bottom, Blake found the joker for which he had been searching.

It is also agreed that, at the discretion of the Master, the crew shall work cargo, load or discharge ballast, perform diving operations, wherever necessary to the successful prosecution of the vessel's business.

With something very like a curse, Blake turned to his bunk.

Whatever he was ordered to do he must do—or suffer the consequences under the articles he had signed. The conviction had come to him that Steelfist Marshall wished him to die, not through any undue confidence, but as a simple means of getting rid of him.

"Then if I'm to get ashore I'd better do it in a hurry," thought Blake. "To blazes with skipper, articles, legality, and everything else! I'd better swim ashore and let the two crews fight out their fight."

He turned over and gripped the revolver, which he had carefully hidden again. Also, he unearthed the contents of Mary Peabody's suit-case, which he had also hidden away after dropping the wreck of the suitcase overboard one night.

Since his only way of deserting seemed to be to swim ashore that night, he made his simple preparations. His revolver and the feminine belongings he rolled up in a scrap of canvas, leaving enough marline loose for a sling, and restowed it under his "donkey's breakfast"—the five-dollar straw tick from the slop chest.

This done, Blake returned on deck and lolled at the rail. The sun was far down the sky, and the masts threw long shadows to the outer reef before the skipper's boat shoved out from shore. Blake noted that another boat, beyond doubt from the Foster, lay empty on the beach a hundred yards from Marshall's point of embarkation.

A moment later it was seen that the skipper had been successful in his trip, for two brown figures were huddled in the bows. Yet from the manner in which Marshall urged on his men, he seemed to be in some haste to reach the ship.

This haste was speedily explained—in a fashion that brought Blake to his feet with a startled cry.

From the edge of the jungle near the Foster's boat spat a tiny bluish-white ring of smoke. Steelfist Marshall sprang erect, then sank down with a spasmodic gesture,

the report of a rifle cracked over the slumberous trees, and all things relapsed again into quietude.

The boat came on with the sea boiling half-way to her painter-ring under the vivid curses of Marshall. As the skipper came up the gangway, Blake saw that he was livid with more than rage, for a spreading crimson splotch dyed his white linen jacket from shoulder to wrist.

"Take the niggers for'ard," he snarled at the alarmed Forrester, and began to peel off his jacket. "That son of a dogfish got to me in my gun arm, blast him! It was Howard, I'll bet my hope o' glory!"

"He went ashore an hour ago, sir," replied the mate. "Hit bad?"

"No. Feels like a flesh puncture, no more. That cursed Howard always was a bad shot, even with a rifle! Best thing is, I've snafled the only two boys on the island who'll dive. That's spiked him!"

"Where's the Gospel-shark!" inquired Long Rube, assisting in tying up the wound.

"The niggers said he'd prob'ly come out to see me. I told 'em to warn him off my ship, blast him! Come on below, an' get this thing fixed."

Four bells clanged out, and Blake slipped to the fo'c's'l'e, only to snatch a biscuit and a hunk of salt beef and return to the deck. Perching on the rail, he watched the gathering dusk along the shore, fastening every point in his mind; he was by this time quite resolved on "skipping the ship" that night.

A hail from the mate startled him. Turning, he saw a small, slim craft, manned by four rowers, coming from the north end of the lagoon. In the stern Blake could make out a bare-headed figure, whose long white hair flew loose on the wind.

"Now we'll have some fun," leered Forrester, turning toward the companionway. "If there's anythin' the Ol' Man likes, it's them hymn-singers!"

And, with a wink toward Blake, he emitted a roar for Captain Marshall.

CHAPTER XI.

A CHANGE OF BASE.

WHEN the old missionary reached the deck Jack Blake felt a painful sense of comparison between his figure and that of the man who faced him.

For all its weight of years, Wicliff's gaunt frame was as erect as the Marshall's main-

mast. His face was bronzed, deeply wrinkled; very strong and steady blue eyes gazed from beneath deep white brows; his entire bearing bespoke a kindly power, a benevolent despotism, as of one who serves a master not to be denied or questioned.

Glancing over the rail Blake noted that the four natives were unarmed, but were gigantic in stature, sitting motionless like bronze statues.

Marshall came down the deck toward Wicliff, pausing only to snap a curt order at Bower to keep the two diving boys out of sight. Then he faced his visitor.

"Well, mister, what can I do for you?"

There was nothing complacent in his attitude, and Blake foresaw trouble in the wolfish face.

"I am John Wicliff, teacher of the Word of God in this island, sir," began the old man, his voice deep and vibrant, and his steady eyes quite fearless. "I have come—"

"Oh, I know who you are, and all about you," broke in Steelfist Marshall with a sneer. He seemed quite unawed by the patriarchal mien of the missionary. "You're the tub-thumpin' hymn singer as put this place on th' everlastin' blink for trade! I know who you are, all right, and I can't say I like you overmuch. What d'you want o' me? That's what I'm askin' ye!"

Blake quietly edged nearer to the poop, a deep anger rising within him. The old man looked at Marshall without resentment; a shade of sorrow rested in his eyes, but no more.

"Brother, you mistake," he returned gently. "I have not fought trade, but only disease and vice. These natives of mine—"

The skipper took a step forward.

"You tell me what you want aboard my ship, and look sharp, mister man! I want none o' your slimy talk."

Wicliff drew himself up, giving Marshall a flash from his quick blue eyes.

"I want nothing, sir, except to ask that you will respect the peace and the tranquillity of my people. Not for many years have they heard shots fired with murderous intent, as they have to-day; the few that are left are peace-loving converts, and my children.

"Now, Captain Marshall, one thing more. I have spoken to Captain Howard to-day. I know his errand here, and yours. I may save you much labor and strife by informing you that all your work here will be in vain, since there is absolutely nothing in

this lagoon worth fighting for or working for. That is what I came to say, sir."

As he listened to this frank speech Marshall's evil passion blazed forth more wolfishly than ever, and his right arm went back.

Blake, gripping the man-rope of the poop ladder, set foot on the lower step, every muscle tensed. Were Marshall brutal enough to attack this old man—

"You listen here!" snarled Steelfist threateningly. "You've ruined enough men here, with your damned Bible palaver and your complaints to the gunboat patrol. I know you, blast you, and I'll go to Tophet if you'll buy chips in my game!

"So Howard got to you first, did he? Curse his ugly mug—he's payin' you to hand out that dope to me, I s'pose! He'll pay you with the end of the main-sheet, and that's your own funeral, my old buck. But you won't play loose with Steelfist Marshall, savvy that? You swim home, quickest you know! Bower—pitch the old bone-rack over the side! Lively!"

Long Rube leaped forward, wrapped his huge arms about the unresisting Wicliff, and bore back the old man to the rail. In ten seconds his grip relaxed, and he staggered away under a stunning blow on the ear.

Blake, his gray eyes blazing with fury, followed up his first lead with a straight right-and-left that sent the second mate reeling again.

Wicliff stood at the rail, gaunt and fearless, refusing to take advantage of the opening to reach his boat.

The second officer fought back viciously, but could not stand before the silent, furious attack of Blake. The latter drove Bower steadily back, sending home blow after blow, worked the man against the wheel and then measured his distance for the finishing uppercut.

But that decisive drive never went home.

Marshall, waiting only until Blake stood steady for a moment, poised that terrible right arm and crashed his steel fist squarely into Blake's temple, felling him like a log.

"Over with him, Forrester!" the skipper snarled.

John Wicliff was hurled clumsily into the sea, to be picked up an instant later by his own natives, in whose bronze faces shimmered lowering hatred. They turned about and were lost in the gathering darkness, sending back a single long yell.

When Blake recovered his senses he found himself lying on the main hatch, his wrists and feet lashed down with small rope. The decks were in semi-darkness, for night had settled on the ship, and during a long space Blake stared up at the blazing stars and cursed everything in general and his own temper in particular.

That savage outburst had only served to work harm upon himself; he did not consider that it might yet have more momentous consequences. His temple throbbed with a heavy ache and his entire skull felt as though it had been ripped from chin to crown.

"I was a fool to let go of myself that way," he reflected bitterly. "I couldn't help old Wicliff, and only got in Dutch myself! Now, two to one, Steelfist will send me down in that diving dress to-morrow and then cut the air-hose. I suppose he means to find the wreck by soundings—"

What was it that Wicliff had said—that there was nothing in the lagoon? At this thought, Blake stiffened in his bonds.

Mary Peabody had sought Wicliff's protection, beyond doubt. And so sincere and grave was the old man's very atmosphere that the girl must have opened her heart to him. Therefore, if there had ever been a wreck in the lagoon, it must now either have been washed out or broken up by the surf.

However that might be, Blake was well aware that his own position was now serious in the extreme. His hard-won standing had been swept away by a moment's anger, and in the morning he could expect to face the wolfish cruelty of Marshall. A twist at his lashings told him he had no hope of escape.

The only man on deck seemed to be a dim figure aft, but Blake's nostrils caught the lazy curl of a pipe, and he guessed that he was by no means alone. This was verified an instant later when a heavy step thudded behind him.

Then, to his surprise, a hand touched his aching head and he caught a low whisper.

"Ay t'ink ju t'irsty, huh?"

An arm slipped under his neck, raising his head, while a pannikin of water was placed to his lips, and he looked up into the pale blue eyes of Ole Kafban. The Finn sat down while helping Blake drink.

"Ju should better cl'ar out, Ay t'ink. Dey vos yolly sore mit ju."

"So I understand," chuckled Blake grim-

ly. "Do you want to come and help Miss Peabody, too?"

"Ay not shwim," came the stolid answer, "Ju want me cut ju free?"

Blake was already calculating. There was no danger of discovery, it seemed, and he was anxious to get hold of his bundle.

"Not yet," he said, as the Finn slipped out his knife. "Go down and fetch me the canvas bundle that's in my bunk. Then if any one examines me while you're gone they'll suspect nothing."

Ole nodded and slid away into the darkness.

For a moment Blake lay training every sense. He heard no sound at all, yet he had a feeling that some one else was close at hand; suddenly he caught his breath sharply as something cold touched his wrists.

"Will ye keep quiet now?" came a warning whisper in the voice of Paddy Ryan.

Blake felt a knife slit through his lashings; then Paddy sank down, till his mouth was against Blake's ear.

"Careful, Dude—the mate's aft. Slip over the side—ain't no sharks here. Them two divers has gone; they heard the niggers yell when the ol' gent was hove over, an' swum for it. Good luck, ol' hoss!"

Before Blake could answer he felt his hands pressed in a quick grip, then Paddy Ryan was gone.

Lying quiet, stretching his cramped hands to restore the circulation, Blake thanked Heaven for the two friends who had come to aid him at this crisis—even though he laughed silently at the fashion in which each had come to complement the help of the other.

The next instant his hands closed on something hard—a pipe and a slab of fine tobacco. He was not ashamed of the tears which sprang to his eyes in that moment; for these were the treasures of Paddy Ryan, the costliest gifts which he could offer to a departing friend.

"Please God, I'll some day repay the debt I owe Paddy Ryan!" Blake told himself.

Thus, when Ole Kafban padded back to him, he rose up and laid hands upon the Finn, sending the man into trembling fright.

"All right," he whispered reassuringly. "I got loose, Ole. Did you get it?"

"H'ar's bundle," came the answer. "Mabbe ju help Miss Peabody?"

"I'll try, anyhow," said Blake cheerfully. "Good-by, old man—sorry you can't swim! If you can get ashore later, do so."

"Sure. Ju climb down dot cable-shain, an' dond't stop for notting! Yump—git oud't, now!"

Ole slipped off, evidently seeing no use in running more risks.

Blake silently crept up to the windlass, finding the forward deck quite deserted. Crouching beside the hawse, he tied the bundle securely to his head; then sent a searching glance into the shimmering radiance of the lagoon to get his bearings.

Once sure of these, he slipped down the cable without a sound, slid into the water and quietly struck out.

Before he had gone ten feet he noted with a little shiver of alarm the flashing swirl of phosphorescence eddying behind him. Were a boat sent after him at this stage, he was lost!

Eight bells tinkled out on the stillness, the strokes leaping across the rippling lagoon to wake soft echoes from the jungle and headlands. A moment later the Foster's bell also rang the hour, proving that Howard was awake.

Neither ship had relaxed sea-watches; the feeling between them was too tense to permit either skipper to leave his vessel to the mercies of a single anchor-watch. While Blake knew, from the ease of his own escape, that some might congregate in the galley for a smoke and a game, he felt pretty certain that the watch from the poop would be keen enough.

A moment later his surmise proved all too correct. He was nearing the black shore-reflection and was striking out in fresh confidence, when shouts rang out from the Marshall—shouts in which Blake caught the angry tones of Bower and the growl of the mate.

Now, knowing that his only chance lay in getting ashore before a boat picked him up, he sprinted hard, careless of the phosphorescence that betrayed him. Something "plutted" into the water by his head, followed by the sharp crack of a rifle; desperately, he renewed his efforts, not daring to pause to allow the radiance to die away.

A second shot echoed out, but he heard the bullet zipping through the trees. Another few strokes, and the sand rose beneath his feet; in ten seconds he was running up the hard beach into shelter of the bush. There he paused, chuckling.

The shots and cries had aroused the Foster to swift suspicion, and over the still lagoon was resounding a wordy war which

in detail was less nice than clever. It was evident that there would be little sleep aboard either ship that night.

Blake, who had put his pumps into the bundle, resumed them, took the revolver from the roll also, and pocketed it. Then he struck out along the beach to the north, careful to keep in shadow of the lantana fringe, and to watch warily for any sign of too curious natives.

He saw no one, however, and the Marshall seemed to have sent out no boats. In ten minutes the light of the mission bungalow gleamed through the bush above, and he cut straight up from the beach toward it. Now that he was within a few yards of meeting the girl who would not pass out of his thoughts, he felt unaccountably embarrassed.

The open veranda of the bungalow was flooded with soft light, but no one seemed to be stationed on watch. The cane screen, rolled up for greater coolness, gave Blake a clear view of the living-room interior.

Two cane lounge chairs faced the doorway. In one sat the white-haired old missionary, reading with untroubled features; in the other, engaged with needle and thread, was Mary Peabody. A lamp-bearing table between them completed the picture, and Blake gazed at it with a lump in his throat.

In neither face was there worry or trouble—the girl looked up to Wicliff with a word and a flashing smile, and the old man nodded placidly. Somewhat ashamed of his prying, Blake stepped up to the veranda, dripping water at every step, and stood in the open doorway.

"Good evening," he said quietly, smiling as he spoke. "I hope that you're still receiving callers, Mr. Wicliff?"

With a swift little cry of alarm the girl dropped her work, staring at the door. But, without surprise, the gaunt missionary rose and advanced, hand extended, as though to greet some well-known and very welcome visitor.

"Good evening, sir, and welcome to you!" he said. As their hands met the two men looked each other in the eye for a moment; and if there was admiration in the gaze of Blake, it was fully repaid in the piercing blue eyes of the old man.

"My name is John Blake," said the American quietly, holding up his bundle and tossing it to the table. "I've just come from the C. H. Marshall, and I've brought

some things which Miss Peabody will, perhaps, be glad to recover."

The girl was staring at him with a look of puzzled recognition. As he smiled, waiting for her to remember, he noted that her eyes were deep brown, that she was rather a woman than a girl, and that in her bearing was a note of capability and efficiency which bespoke the blood of old Captain Peabody of clipper-ship days. She was well poised, thought Blake.

"Why—" and the girl rose, putting out her hand, her eyes steadily on his, "aren't you the gentleman who—who did me a very great service that night by the Custom House back in 'Frisco?"

"I had that honor," and Blake laughed as their hands gripped. "Unfortunately, I did not know about Captain Marshall's steel fist until he made me painfully aware of it, and then shanghaied me—"

"And," broke in Wicliff's deep, severe voice, "this is the man of whom I told you, Miss Peabody—the same who made that luckless but very gallant effort to save me from rough handling this afternoon. Sit down, Mr. Blake—I gather that you have swum ashore from the ship?"

Blake, blushing, became acutely conscious of his extremely disreputable garb and general appearance.

"If you'll be good enough to lend me some decent clothes," he said, turning, "I'll venture to ask your hospitality for some time to come. I'm afraid my late quarters are too hot to hold me—"

"My dear fellow, I beg your pardon!" exclaimed Wicliff, taking his arm. "Excuse us, Miss Peabody! Come along, Blake; I've plenty of room here, and—hello! You've a nasty bruise there! Well, it can wait till we return."

Blake followed his host to a small, immaculate bedroom, where Wicliff got out a razor and some white clothes. Despite the ragged bruise on his temple, in twenty minutes Blake looked and felt like a new man; he was free, all the enforced humility of ordinary seaman was sloughed, and he was again the Jack Blake of old.

Yet not the same, he realized as he inspected himself in the mirror. His face was indefinably older and grimmer, set in steadier lines, stamped with the seal of strife and hard living; it had gained in strength, if not in beauty, he reflected. Then, looking at his hands, he held them out to Wicliff with a laugh.

"I thought a few months ago that I had strong hands—but look at them now! Brine and holystones and tarred ropes combine to make a poor manicure, eh? By the way, I gather that you know Miss Peabody's story?"

"Yes," nodded the old man, gravely. "And I knew her grandfather twenty years and more ago, before his ship broke over that outer reef. Now—all ready?"

They returned to the living-room and Blake, a smile transforming his hard-chiseled features, walked up to the girl.

"I feel like being introduced all over again," he laughed. "I haven't been so presentable since the first time we met, Miss Peabody!"

"Well, you certainly have changed in the last few moments," she agreed, with a twinkle of appreciation in her eye.

Wicliff had gone to a large sandalwood chest and was bending over it.

The girl touched the bundle, which lay where Blake had tossed it.

"Did you mean to say that this was mine?" she asked, puzzled.

Blake nodded, unknitting the marline.

"Yes—the contents of your suitcase. You see, Marshall kidnaped Ole Kafban at Honolulu. I was able to kidnap the suitcase on my own hook, and managed to keep its contents intact and out of sight. Your friend Ole is a mighty good man, by the way; it was owing to him that I got free to-night."

"I'm glad Ole is safe," she answered, watching the bundle in astonishment as Blake unrolled it. "The poor fellow tried to be kind to me—though Captain Howard swore that he had stolen my suitcase and joined your ship."

Wicliff stood up and set a flask and roll of linen on the table.

"Now for your head, Blake," he said. "Sit down, and we'll soon have you fixed up; meantime, you might give us an outline of your story. There seem to be a good many things that need explaining—such as the revolver in your pocket, for instance."

Blake started. He had thought that he had transferred the weapon to his white coat without being observed, and the implied rebuke did not escape him.

"That revolver may prove to be a good friend yet," he returned, as he sat down. "Well, no matter. Here's the gist of my yarn, Miss Peabody."

And so he related his experience, and

Mary Peabody's brown eyes compelled more of his tale, perhaps, than he had thought to tell.

CHAPTER XII.

A SUDDEN BREAK TO PEACE.

THERE are a few things I'm anxious to know myself," said Blake, when he had made an end of his story. "Why, for instance, did you not stop ashore at Honolulu, Miss Peabody? Had you not realized Howard's villainy at that time?"

The girl nodded gravely.

"Yes. But I had to pay him in advance for my charter, and—and—well, Mr. Blake, I simply had no more money. Everything depended on this voyage for me, as I knew that my grandfather had the savings of a lifetime with him when he was wrecked; the location of the wreck I got from my father, who in turn had received it from one of the few survivors."

"And has no one ever looked for it since?" exclaimed Blake, in surprise.

At the question he saw a swift look pass between the missionary and Mary Peabody, and as the girl hesitated, he continued swiftly.

"I beg your pardon—I was not trying to pry into your secret. Let's forget the whole subject of treasure, anyway. Mr. Wicliff, I trust that you don't mind sheltering me for the present?"

"Most assuredly not," smiled the old man, and Blake noted again the piercing keenness of the blue eyes. "And Miss Peabody will lose nothing if my poor efforts can prevent it. So the two ships are at odds, eh?"

"Something of the sort," laughed Blake. "Each crew is determined to cheat each other, each hates each other like the devil hates holy water, and I don't think they would need the incentive of treasure to be at each other's throats. By the way, are your natives armed? Can you resist any attempt at landing?"

Wicliff shook his head somberly.

"No. And I am deeply grieved that, after many years of peace, my little vineyard must again witness the strife of brutal men. When I came here, the island held a population of a thousand or more—perhaps the most vicious savages in the south seas. Now, I am glad to say, there are but twelve men left."

Blake stared, incredulous; then wondered if he had heard aright.

"Eh?" he exclaimed sharply. "You mean twelve hundred?"

"No," and Wicliff smiled. "I mean twelve. They are young, each has a wife, and the little ones have not a bodily blemish. Perhaps you do not understand the terrible effects of vice and iniquity in these latitudes, Mr. Blake?"

"There are a good many things I'm ignorant of," and Blake leaned back in wonder. "I can't see why you're glad that you have twelve parishioners instead of a thousand."

Mary Peabody laughed.

"Don't you see—Mr. Wicliff has for twenty years presided over an experiment in eugenics, so to speak! And now he's succeeded in starting a new race, practically, which will be twice as good as the old one. Isn't that right?"

Wicliff nodded soberly. "Yes, and before I am called away I trust that I shall see the village in the way of sturdy growth again."

His voice vibrant with the kindly wisdom of his years, he spoke of his work here in Fulai; and as he listened, Jack Blake as never before realized how he himself, with his polo and motor-cars and wealth, was nothing in the face of such a man as this John Wicliff, whose whole life had spelled service.

Wicliff told of his twenty years of patient labor, his struggles against a warlike population rendered hostile to him by the wiles and liquor of traders. He spoke of the ravages made by disease and drunkenness among the natives, how scores of them had been black-birded, how their fearless and free spirit had been all but crushed as their numbers had decreased more alarmingly each year.

"But at last," concluded Wicliff, "the authorities stepped in and forced the traders and slavers to leave us in peace. Now, thank God, those who are left are clean in body and soul; my reward has come in the love and trust which they repose in me, and this has made the struggle well worth while."

The missionary fell silent, staring down at the floor. Mary Peabody was watching him with so rapt a face that Jack Blake caught his breath suddenly; never had he thought to see such expression on the face of a woman as he surprised on hers in that moment.

"What did you put on my head?" he

asked, and felt almost guilty as he saw the girl's face change. "It has taken the pain out, and the swelling is certainly going down fast!"

"A native ointment," said Wicliff, rousing himself from his day-dream. "These natives were very warlike, as I said, and they had many such preparations. I have found them very good."

Blake nodded.

"And now," he said quietly, "I hope that you and Miss Peabody will accept my services and assistance? It was for that purpose I left the ship, and I cannot return. I'm very much afraid that our troubles are not yet ended."

The girl rose and extended her hand to him, her gaze holding his with a steadiness that was almost disconcerting.

"Thank you, Mr. Blake. And I want you to know that I am deeply grateful, both for your trouble and kindness in bringing my things, and for your earlier service at San Francisco—the cause of all your own troubles. Now I think I'll say good night, and we'll see you in the morning."

Blake smiled, and again his hard-lined face was transformed into that tenderness for which many women love some men.

"Your friendship and trust are higher payment than I had ever hoped to find, Miss Peabody. Good night, and pleasant dreams!"

She vanished, and Blake turned as Wicliff's hand fell on his shoulder.

"My son," and the old man's eyes bit deep, "you are a man—aye, such a man as I would wish to call my son in all truth! Now, for the present you had best occupy a hammock on the veranda at night, and for to-morrow at least remain out in the bush, lest your skipper come in search of you. My natives will care for and watch over you, never fear."

"Thank you," responded Blake, surprised anew by the strength of the wrinkled hand that gripped his. "And you'll arm your boys, I suppose?"

"Not for the present—God forbid! I have means to protect Miss Peabody for a little while, I think. Now come along, and sleep secure."

Five minutes later Blake rolled into a hammock slung on the veranda. He was asleep almost at once; but before he dropped off he looked out at the starlit lagoon, and made one remark to the riding-light of the Marshall.

"By the Lord, she's a *woman*!"

At sunrise Blake breakfasted with Mary Peabody and Wicliff, finding that no movement had been noted aboard the two ships.

Since it was certain that Steelfist Marshall would not passively accept the desertion of Blake, following that of the two natives, Wicliff determined to adopt precautionary measures at once.

Much against her wish, Mary Peabody was sent off with two of the natives to the village, located two miles back in the bush toward the opposite side of the island. Here she would remain out of harm's way for the present. Wicliff himself would stay at the bungalow; the missionary stated rightly enough that he had little to fear, with his natives in the bush to protect the approaches.

Before the morning grew hot two natives took Blake up beyond the bungalow to the crest of the northern headland. Here he found a small grass hut at the edge of the banana groves, from which the entire lagoon and a half-moon of beach lay in plain view.

Before the natives vanished they also showed Blake a path leading to the village, but out of sight from the ships below. He esconced himself comfortably with binoculars and basket of food, and prepared to watch operations.

His view was beautiful in the extreme, and he had small thought for the passing of time. Below him, the reef-heads revealed themselves pale-green under the swells which held the blackness of immense depth farther out; and, deeply though he detested the ships in the lagoon, despite his soul-dwarfing experiences with them, his heart could not but leap to the picture they presented.

They were just distant enough to be rid of blemishes. The rusty black sides, streaked by weeks of seafaring, gleamed in the morning glow like polished ebony. The stained and splintered rails set off the black hulls like lines of flashing ivory. Even in the verdigris-green brasswork of binnacles, bells, pole-compasses and skylight gratings, the searching sunlight picked out shining metal that gleamed up at him in blinding brilliance.

And, towering high into the vasty deep of the blue sky, the masts became streaks of gold, ruled with flashing threads of cobwebbery and crossed by other golden streaks whereon the slovenly-furled sails lay like spotless snow.

With the full day, however, came teeming activity aboard the two ships. Boats were put out and began flitting over the lagoon; evidently both skippers were making search for the wreck. One boat, however, made a straight course for the bungalow, and through his glasses Blake saw Steelfist Marshall in her stern.

Running up the beach, the boat landed and Marshall vanished toward the bungalow, which was just out of Blake's range of vision. For half an hour nothing happened; then Marshall reappeared, plainly in a towering rage, and drove his men out with curses that reached Blake's ears.

Noon came and passed almost unnoticed by the watching Blake.

In some anxiety as to the result of that visit, Blake finally leaped up and started down the path leading to the bungalow. As he did so, however, a bronze and grinning native stepped from the tangle of bush, holding up one hand in token of peace; at the man's back was slung a wicked shark-tooth spear.

The man had been one of his guides, Blake remembered.

"No 'fraid, only me!" said the native in a mellow voice.

"Glad to see you," laughed Blake. "Where's Mr. Wicliff? Is he all right?"

"All ri', all ri', you no 'fraid! Stop along alla same I show you—bimeby come miss'nary papa. You stop?"

Blake nodded, reassured, and returned to his hut.

Now he observed that the questing boats were fast falling foul of each other, and at the far side of the lagoon two of the small craft were engaged in a fast and furious oar fight.

"Hello!" chuckled Blake. "There's the red-headed Bingham—bet a dollar he falls foul of Forrester—ah, I thought so!"

Sure enough, Bingham's boat had fouled the bows of Bully Forrester's cutter. The two mates drew an oar's length distant from each other and evidently began to exchange compliments.

A moment later something flashed from Bingham's boat, and one of Forrester's men fell and lay limply across the thwart. With a mad dipping of oars, the two boats came together.

"Poor fellows—and all for nothing!" exclaimed a pitying voice.

Blake whirled, and saw John Wicliff standing at his shoulder, watching the

lagoon with sorrowful eyes. Turning again to the water, Blake leaned forward in excitement, every nerve taut.

"Look at that!" he exclaimed. "It's rank murder—God!"

Oars, boathooks and stretchers were flashing between the two boatcrews in murderous play. But Forrester had risen in the stern, out of the mêlée, the coiled leadline in his left hand.

Twice the sounding-lead whirled around his head, then he loosed it with deadly aim. The plummet took Bingham squarely over the ear; the red-haired mate of the Foster went down and lay motionless.

Then the Foster's men pulled out of the combat, pursued by taunting yells. But Blake knew that one man had died this day.

He was human enough to care little how far this work went among the two crews; he was human enough to care a great deal for Wicliff and the little flock of natives; but when he looked into the eyes of the patriarch, Jack Blake realized that this man had a spirituality, a common humanity with all things, such as he himself would never know.

"All is well with us, Blake," said Wicliff quietly. "Marshall visited me, and I gave him no satisfaction. Two of my boys were repairing their spears, and the tacit warning reached him. He went away cursing you."

"Curses come home to roost," laughed Blake. "Good for you! By the way, just where is the wreck of Peabody's ship? They seem to be quartering the lagoon without much success."

Wicliff smiled, and pointed to the reef.

"She broke up at the false entrance, just here under us, where your ship grounded. She never got safe inside, but was swept over the reef after striking, and sank immediately. She must have broken her back when she struck."

"Hm!" mused Blake. "Then they'll find her sooner or later, eh?"

"I suppose so," and Wicliff nodded. "Now, for the present, you had better stay here night and day, Blake. Miss Peabody is remaining at the village, also. I'll have your hammock brought up and slung here."

"But—"

"No objections, please!" Wicliff's blue eyes flashed sternly as he gazed at the ships below. "I want to avoid all strife as far as possible, and want to keep my little band of natives intact. So farewell until to-mor-

row—you'll be kept supplied with food and water."

Wicliff departed, and Blake resigned himself to patience.

With the next morning a body, evidently that of Bingham, was slid overboard from the Foster with scant ceremony. As the boats put out again, Blake wondered that Howard did not attempt reprisals—then saw the reason and chuckled.

Long Rube Bower was in the maintop of the Marshall, armed with a rifle; since he had complete command of the Foster's decks, it was evident that for the present a state of armed peace would ensue.

Nor were there further conflicts between the boat crews, though enough of bad language and threatening overtures were exchanged. All that day the boats swept the lagoon with lead-lines, working gradually toward the head of the lagoon where lay the false entrance, but finding nothing.

Watching their progress, Blake could make out Cutlip Sullivan and Young Boston in one of the Foster's boats, while Keough seemed to be serving as bo'sun aboard Howard's ship. Plainly, the three men were better content there than under Steelfist Marshall.

Although natives appeared with food for him, Blake gained no word of Wicliff or Mary Peabody that day, save that he was to "stop along here one time—miss'nary papa all ri'! White Mary all ri'!" And so the night fell, and Blake swung into his hammock, confident that the natives were watching all that went on in the lagoon.

With the next morning Forrester appeared in the Marshall's rigging, his rifle holding a menace over the Foster. But still Howard seemed content to make no overt move, merely sending out his boats to continue quartering the lagoon.

Knowing as he did the exact location of the wreck, providing there were anything left of it, Blake kept his glasses trained with growing interest. It was plain that both crews were watching each other narrowly, as the boats gradually drew into the head of the lagoon, almost under Blake's cranny.

"Getting close!" thought Blake, toward noon. "If they find nothing, they're apt to come ashore after Mary Peabody for further information. And that means trouble."

Eight bells rang out, and the boats returned for the noon meal. Half an hour

later the Marshall's boats again put out for the north end of the lagoon. The crew of the Foster tumbled over also, but there seemed to be a delay; then the Foster's forecable sprang into sudden activity, her boats lined out ahead, and Blake saw that they had taken hawsers from the ship.

"Found it!" he ejaculated, seizing his glasses. "Howard's a slick one, right enough! And he's got the lead on Marshall!"

As the Foster began to move in tow of her boats, those from the Marshall came racing in—Steelfist, in charge of them, evidently realizing that Howard had located the wreck in the course of the morning.

Drive his men though he would, Steelfist was far behind. The Marshall had barely begun to move when the John Foster dropped anchor immediately opposite and just inside the false entrance of the reef.

"He found it all right," thought Blake. "That's exactly where Wicliff said the wreck had washed over!"

Steelfist Marshall crowded his ship in beside the Foster—so close that they had barely room to swing to their anchors.

Almost underneath the headland as they were, everything aboard the two ships was distinct and clear to Blake; he could pick out every man aboard the Marshall by some familiar peculiarity of gait or figure.

No sooner were the ships moored than there was a bustle and a glint of metal on both decks, as diving-pumps were rigged and suits made ready.

Big Frank Keough went down for the Foster; and, with a feeling of helpless wrath, Blake saw Ole Kafban forced to don the antiquated harness of the Marshall. Bully Forrester took charge of the pumps, however, and Blake realized that Steelfist was no doubt trying the apparatus on the Finn with a view to sending down a better man later.

Darkness put an end to the operations, however, and before the clank of pumps had ceased both divers regained their ships safely. Since no hostilities were in evidence, Blake conjectured that a truce had been arranged by tacit consent; it was folly to waste men over nothing, and it would be time enough to fight when either skipper had something to fight for.

Concluding that there was for the present no danger at all, Blake determined to return to the house and, possibly, go on to

the native village where Mary Peabody was domiciled. When the native appeared with his supper of fish and taro wrapped in leaves, Blake turned to him with this resolve.

"Where's Mr. Wicliff? He stop along house?"

"He all ri'," grinned the native with exasperating complacency. "Miss'nary papa say you stop along here one time."

"Well, look see," rejoined Blake. "You speak miss'nary papa that I'm coming to the house, savvy? Where's Miss Peabody?"

"White Mary all ri'."

Blake grunted. Evidently he could extract nothing.

"You savvy bad fella down there?" and he pointed to the ships and lagoon.

"Savvy all ri'," and the native, with a grin, touched his shark-tooth spear. "We fix 'um. No 'fraid!"

"Run along then, and be a good boy," laughed Blake, his ill-humor unable to stand before the cheerful grins of the native. "Speak miss'nary papa that I'm coming to the house to-night. I want to see him and Miss Peabody too. You savvy that?"

"Savvy all ri'," nodded the native, and with a flash of teeth turned about and was gone.

Blake ate his supper and then, lighting the pipe which Paddy Ryan had left with him, started off for the bungalow.

He paid no attention to the warning which the native had conveyed. Wicliff, he considered, was striving hard to maintain peace and probably wanted him safe out of the way.

This, however, was by no means to Blake's notion of the fitness of things. There seemed to be no danger for the present from either Howard or Marshall, and—the brown eyes of Mary Peabody argued away all objections in Blake's mind.

Upon reaching the bungalow, he found it dark and evidently deserted. The place seemed almost unnaturally quiet. When he stepped to the veranda and called no answer came, and Blake wondered if there were any one on guard near by.

"Well, I'll finish my pipe," he reflected, drawing a chair near the steps and settling down. "If no one shows up by that time, I'll strike out for the village and see what I can see!"

So, for a space, he rested in comfort, listening to the rustling and sighing of the

breeze in the jungle. Then, as he knocked out his pipe he stiffened suddenly at a voice which seemed startlingly close.

"Watch them rats, Bower! Come along, you blasted skunks!"

It was the voice of Steelfist Marshall. Before Blake could more than grip the revolver in his pocket, he saw the dim, shadowy figures of a half dozen men crowding from the path into the edge of the clearing. There they halted, vague in the starlight.

From the lantanas came a whisper and a rustle. The men with Marshall cried out in swift alarm, and the skipper cursed vividly.

"Arrows—the devil! What in hell—"

"Look out!" sounded Bower's voice quickly. "They're beatin' it, cap'n! Git out o' here quick, or we're gone! Poison—"

That word of itself stampeded them, and Marshall's curses died out as he followed hastily. From the lantanas came a guttural ripple of laughter, though no figures appeared in the clearing.

Blake chuckled, his tensed muscles relaxing. Steelfist's night raid had ended in blind panic, for it was plain that the arrows had done no harm; but Blake was now well assured that the natives were keeping good watch.

Curious to see the result of that panic, he stepped to the ground and strode off along the path to the beach. If Marshall were gathering his forces for a second effort, thought Blake, he could make himself useful.

It soon proved, however, that Steelfist and his men had no stomach for such work at night. As Blake reached the edge of the bush and stepped out to the strip of beach he chuckled again at sight of the trail of phosphorescence left by Marshall's cutter, which was heading for the ship at full speed.

Delighted with the cool sweetness of the shore, Blake got out his pipe again and began to fill it, walking along the fringe of lantanas.

"There'll be no more night raids from the C. H. Marshall," he reflected. "And for to-morrow, at least, they'll be busy diving. I wish I could get Ole ashore! Still, he's not a fighting man, and these natives seem to be efficient enough in their own way—hello! What's this?"

At the water's edge lay a mass of tangled wreckage—palms and bush, perhaps driven up by some storm from the reef or the

other end of the lagoon. As Blake came to it he noted a dark shape just behind; it proved to be a ship's boat, drawn up on the sand, and deserted. Probably it had been hidden from the sight of Marshall.

As Blake halted, staring at it, he heard a sudden laugh, and turned. But as he did so, a figure crashed into him, another figure fell bodily upon him and bore him face downward into the sand, and he heard a rush of feet.

So sudden was the attack that to fight back was impossible. As Blake went down hands caught his arms and ankles, and he felt himself wrapped with rope. A foul-smelling rag was wound about his mouth, and a moment later he was flung roughly into the boat, which scraped over the sand to the water.

"Gotcher, huh?" rumbled a voice in his ear—the voice of Cutlip Sullivan. "Now ye'll pay fer that lickin' ye give me, my bucko! Ye'll get plain hell aboard the Foster, an' it's me what'll give it to ye, see?"

CHAPTER XIII.

HOWARD'S VENGEANCE.

"WHO ye got there, Jackson?"

Howard's voice sang out as the boat swung in to the John Foster. Jackson, formerly second officer and now mate, vice Bingham, seemed to be in command of the shore party, for he answered at once from somewhere near Blake. But his tones were cautious.

"We got their star fighter, the Dude, sir. Go easy till we get him up—hoist away quietly, there! No use tellin' the Marshall all our business."

It was plain to Blake that the later developments of his own story were unknown to those aboard the Foster, who knew only what Sullivan, Keough and Boston had told them after leaving Honolulu. And that tale had lost nothing in the telling.

Five minutes later Blake was dragged to the poop, promising himself that at some future day he would richly repay the kicks with which Sullivan regaled him *en route*. He found the mate reporting to Howard, and his gag was stripped off, then his foot lashings removed.

"He was skulkin' in the bush, like he was dodgin' Marshall," said Jackson, who had an Irish-cockney whine to him. "Make him talk, sir—"

"You shut your head an' go below," broke in Howard. "You men git for'ard an' keep an eye on that blasted Marshall! I'll 'tend to this man."

Howard was obeyed promptly. Blake followed the skipper's beckoning finger aft, and was told to sit down on the wheel-gratings. Howard stood leaning on the wheel-box, massive and dominant, eying Blake as closely as the uncertain starlight would permit.

"So you're the bully who's raised so much hell aboard the Marshall, eh?" he asked thoughtfully.

Blake, who had been mentally kicking himself for his stupidity in being caught napping, held his peace. Howard's manner was anything but hostile, and his next words gave Blake a very definite notion of the ideas working behind his massive features.

"I hear you licked Steelfist, son. That's goin' some, single-handed. Mebbe you ain't in love with him, specially?"

"We aren't exactly bosom friends," returned Blake dryly. "He shanghaied me in San Francisco, for one thing. For another, he gave me a nice bump with his steel hand the other day—a little love-tap I'd like to return with interest."

Instantly Blake saw that he had adopted the right attitude. Howard grinned.

"If you pull with me you'll get the chanct, Dude! His rats have killed my mate, and this time's goin' to be his finish—he's butted in on my voyages long enough. Now, how about it? Want to ship?"

"Not particularly." Blake felt his ground cautiously now, convinced that Howard wanted a fighting recruit more than a hostage. "I don't care a snap about either of you, Howard. Marshall's out to find this treasure, and I gather that you're out to cheat Miss Peabody if you can, ahead of Marshall. Isn't that the way it lies?"

Howard stroked his big jowl reflectively.

"No, I can't say it is," he returned slowly. "So that cursed Finn has been tellin' tales about things, huh? Let's see, now. Why might you think I'm out to cheat the girl, Dude?"

Here was a skipper with more brains than Marshall, thought Blake. He was not at all deceived in the matter; but, convinced that he was now fighting for more than his own safety alone, he followed Howard's lead cautiously.

"General principles, Howard. We learned a few things from the Finn, of course, and Miss Peabody seemed mighty anxious to leave your ship."

"Huh! You ain't seen her, ashore?"

"I tried to hard enough," and Blake grinned to himself. "But she wasn't in sight around the house, and your men nabbed me before I got farther."

All of which was essentially true, and drew another grunt of satisfaction from the bull-like skipper, who plainly thought that he had measured up his captive at last.

"Listen here," and Howard leaned forward earnestly. "Miss Peabody chartered my ship to come here, see? I ain't playin' against her none whatever—I'm buckin' Marshall's game. He's the guy that's tryin' to cheat her. Ain't you willin' to stand up an' fight for a skirt, Dude?"

"If Miss Peabody's business is safe with you," rejoined Blake promptly, "then set me free and count me in to whip Marshall. I've skipped his ship, and I'm willing to help secure Miss Peabody's interests. That's all I have to say."

"And it's enough for me, my bucko." With a great show of candor Howard caught Blake's wrists and loosened the rope. "You name's Blake, ain't it? Well, I don't want you puttin' any o' my bullies out o' commission, and Bingham's gone—damn that Forrester! We want fighters, not seamen. You'll live aft an' rank as actin' second mate."

"That suits me," said Blake quietly.

Howard nodded as if well pleased, and led Blake to a berth off the cabin, after which he resumed the deck.

"Not so bad!" reflected the new second officer of the John Foster. "You didn't fool me a little bit, Cap'n Slick Howard! I'll spring a big surprise on you one of these days—and meantime, I'd better rest up while I can."

Whereupon Jack Blake rolled into his berth, chuckled anew at the "slickness" of the astute Captain Howard, and fell asleep.

He could not afford to worry over the anxiety his absence might cause Wicliff, and knew that his whereabouts would soon be descried from shore by the missionary. All things considered, it was a stroke of luck which had brought about his presence on the Foster; especially as he would be in a position to take an active hand in affairs were any shore raid contemplated by Howard.

Blake's appearance on deck the next morning was greeted by a yell and a volley of abuse from the Marshall; while, closer at hand, the consternation of Cutlip Sullivan was evident on the discovery of Blake's new position.

It was not so with Keough and young Boston, however; they were plainly glad to see Blake again, and Big Frank expressed decided satisfaction when Howard assigned Blake in charge of the diving pumps. The Foster had two excellent diving suits.

Promptly after breakfast the pumps were manned and Keough went down again. A man from the rival ship was also down, but as the Marshall's pumps were rigged on the opposite side of the forecastle from the Foster, Blake could not make out the identity of the diver. This was not long in doubt, however.

After twenty minutes below Keough came up, his copper helmet was unscrewed, and he reported that the Marshall was anchored squarely over the stern portion of the wreck. The Foster lay twenty fathoms too far up to work on the stern, which hung on a crag of reef in shallow water, but lay over the bows where they had been found on the previous day.

"We want to rummage in the stern, not the bows, you lunkhead!" raved Howard furiously. "Get below again! Ain't you man enough to hold up your end with anybody Marshall can send down? You're big enough to eat old Steelfist himself!"

"Well, it *is* Steelfist!" growled Keough surlily, displaying a long scratch on his rubber sleeve. "I laid over to him, an' he come at me with his knife. I come up to git one for myself."

"Why in thunder didn't you say so? You come up like a dumb fool an' peel off palaver about bows an' sterns—want me to go down myself? What the—"

"Oh, shut yer head!" snapped Keough, in a rage. "Gimme a knife an' I'll git the son of a dogfish myself. What you s'pose I shipped in yer stinkin' old barge fer?"

Provided with a long knife from the galley, Keough turned to Blake.

"Give us plenty o' rope, Dude, an' keep them rats pumpin' steady, will you? I'm a-goin' to draw blood this time."

The helmet was screwed on, and Keough vanished. For five minutes Blake watched the line run out, then came a signal for less air.

Howard was himself tending the lines,

and reported a moment later that all was steady. Only the ceaseless grind of the pumps was heard, as all hands watched the water, fascinated.

"Gawd a'mighty!" burst from Howard. "Look at that!"

Between the two ships had risen a sudden seething whirl of water, followed by a burst of air-bubbles. A furious tug wrenched the lines from Howard's fingers, then came more bubbles bursting into froth on the surface.

"Pull, you fools!" yelled Blake sharply, seizing the lines.

Howard aided him, white-faced. Three, four, six fathoms of slack came in, then came a curled snarl—and the end of both lines, slashed off sharp.

As Blake realized what must have happened, a hail sounded from the other ship, and Steelfist Marshall appeared at her rail, his black mop of hair emerging from his diving suit.

"Send down another one to-morrow!" came the savage taunt. "Send the Dude, an' Boston, an' Sullivan, blast ye! Send yer whole blasted crew, Howard, an' come yerself!"

And with a laugh Steelfist vanished from sight.

Blake shuddered, and turned away. There was no use sending another man for Keough, even had another been willing to go. Big Frank was dead—had died when those bubbles came frothing to the surface, for these diving suits had no emergency valves.

Howard sprang to the rail, revolver in hand, but no one was in sight aboard the Marshall. Then the maddened skipper began to curse, until even his waterfront sweepings shivered at the torrent of blasphemy that poured from him.

With hand aloft, Howard called heaven to witness his vow of revenge—a vow that included the C. H. Marshall and every soul aboard her.

From the Marshall's decks volleyed a chorus of ribald merriment that ate into Howard's soul like acid into soft iron.

"Laugh, you condemned cut-throats!" he screamed. "Laugh yer fill! Ye'll laugh in hell to-night!"

Turning and leaping to the deck, his face like that of a madman, Howard roared out furious commands, and the men sprang to obedience.

Blake was puzzled. All diving was given

up for the day, it seemed; the spare suit was taken to Howard's cabin and the skipper rushed after it, summoning Jackson and bidding Blake take the deck.

And in the cabin the two officers remained for the rest of the day, while the Marshall's diving operations proceeded unhindered.

It was the general consensus of opinion among the men, however, that Howard had "something up his sleeve," and many were the conjectures voiced as to its nature. At four bells in the afternoon watch Jackson appeared, shook his head in response to Blake's question, and called away a boat's crew.

Jackson's business, it appeared, was to carry a kedge to a point opposite the Marshall, planting it firmly in the coral of the reef. When he returned, he flung an evil grin at Blake.

"We'll haul off a ways to-night, Dude. Trust the Ol' Man to hand Steelfist one!"

He vanished again, this time taking a bucket of tar with him. An hour later Blake was sitting on the knighthead, alone with his pipe, when young Boston approached him somewhat diffidently.

"I'd like to ask ye somethin', Dude—sir, I mean."

Blake chuckled inwardly at this unwonted form of address, and eyed the speaker. As his nickname indicated, Boston was a callow youth, patently on his first voyage.

"Fire away, Boston. What's up?"

"I dunno, sir," and Boston shifted uneasily, with furtive glances aft. "I know you ain't Marshall's kind o' man, nor Howard's neither—and—and—"

"Out with it, old fellow," smiled Blake quietly. "You're quite right so far, and you can trust me. What's on your mind?"

"It's these here blamed murders!" broke out Boston, desperately. "I can't stand it, and I ain't goin' to stand it! I ain't any pirate an' murderer, Dude—I wish to Hades I'd never come to sea, I do!"

"So do I," nodded Blake grimly, his gray eyes narrowed. "Any more of the men feel that way about it, Boston?"

"I guess they do. We ain't seen no buried treasure, an' if we don't get out o' here that shark-hearted Marshall is goin' to get us all. If I talk to some o' the boys will you come ashore with us an' skip ship?"

The young fellow was in deathly earnest, else he never would have broached such an idea, as Blake knew.

"Yes," and Blake extended his hand. "Here's my fist on it, Boston. You and any of the other men who'll play square will find me willing to help. But mind, I'll have no funny work! It you come ashore with me, you'll obey me."

"Gawd knows, sir, all I want's to get out o' here!" and with that Boston shuffled away.

The two officers did not reappear until the wizened Chinese steward was serving the evening meal. It was then dead low water, and the fast-falling tropic evening had already cast a dusky screen over the lagoon.

"Now, my bullies," said the skipper softly, "we'll even up scores with Steelfist. We owe him two dead men already."

A low growl of assent arose from the men, but as yet Blake could see no signs of the indicated revenge. Howard proceeded to climb into the spare diving suit, to the breast of which had been fastened an electric torch incased in a tarry waterproof sheath.

"You tend the pumps, Mr. Blake," he grunted. "Mr. Jackson, you got that stuff tested?"

"It's workin' fine, sir," rejoined Jackson, his whine tinged with eagerness.

At this moment came a hail from the Marshall in the voice of her skipper.

"Hey, there, Howard! You waked up yet?"

"You'll know soon enough!" roared Howard, with a curse.

"Thanks for your good wishes," sneered Marshall. "We've been workin' this afternoon, and there ain't any stuff in that blasted wreck. If you're willin' to combine forces—"

"You go plumb to Hades!" bellowed Howard, shaking his fist at the darkness. "I wouldn't belive your word on a million Bibles, Steelfist Charley! I wouldn't touch ye if you was drownin' to death! I hope I see ye roastin' on the devil's gridiron an' beggin' yer heart out fer water!"

Trembling with rage, Howard signed to Blake to screw on his helmet. No further word came from the other ship.

There was a heavy splash alongside the gangway, and Blake looked up to see that Jackson had flung something overboard and seemed to be watching it. Howard, completely incased from head to foot, was assisted down.

At the foot of the ladder he halted,

gripped something carefully, and was lowered away out of sight.

Wondering mightily what all this secrecy was about, Blake assured himself that the pumps were working steadily, and then approached the main rigging where Jackson stood.

"Keep away from them wires, fer Gawd's sake!" broke out the mate in a hoarse whisper.

Blake halted abruptly.

"Wires?" he repeated. "What—"

"Get back to them pumps, will ye? Don't foul them batteries under the poop, or we'll all blow to bloomin' Hades together. It's hard enough without payin' out these blasted wires in the dark—"

Blake turned and went back to the pumps. He felt suddenly stunned, horrified beyond words, heartsick.

Jackson was paying out wire and batteries were placed under the poop! And what was the heavy object which had been dropped over the side and which Howard had caught up so tenderly as he went into the depths?

Taking up the lines, Blake paid them out slowly, a premonition of horror upon him which he could not shake off.

Behind him were grouped the men, tense, expectant, silent. Through the quivering hush of the tropic night came a mutter of talk from the other ship, the scratch of a match, the snatch of a chanty in Paddy Ryan's voice—

The lines ceased to pay out, and Howard signaled for more air. Cutlip and young Boston were at the pumps, and Blake, who seldom swore, mouthed an oath as he turned and sped up the grinding wheels. A moment later he felt the haul-in jerks.

"Bear a hand here, two of you!" he snapped hoarsely.

The dripping coils wound up beside him. Howard, who had gone to six fathoms, paused half-way up to relieve the blood-pressure; that two minutes of waiting seemed an age to Blake.

At last the huge helmet broke water, and Howard was hauled aboard. At the same instant Jackson barked out a curt order.

"Port watch for'ard! Lay on to that capstan, an' sharp about it!"

Evidently it mattered nothing that the Marshall would hear the clinking pawls. But, as the men fell to work, Jackson halted them abruptly.

From the Marshall came the clatter of

oars, voices, and the deep "Give way!" of Steelfist himself as a boat set out for shore.

"Hell and blazes!" swore Howard, floundering ponderously in his clumsy leaded boots. "Get me out o' this rig! Eight o' you bullies tumble into the cutter—jump, you rats! You stay aboard, Blake."

With laborious rapidity the dripping suit was flung aside. The skipper dashed below, returning with a .45 in either hand, and promptly leaped down to the boat.

"Shove off, bullies!" Howard turned and flung a low order over his shoulder. "Soon's you're kedged out, Jackson, touch her off! Send the Dude with all the men but you an' a couple more—we'll need help ashore—"

The big cutter gathered way and was lost in the darkness. Now under Jackson's curses the windlass began its song and the Foster moved slowly away from the Marshall, kedged out toward the reef.

Blake seized the opportunity and leaped for the after cabins. He had lost the revolver gained from Bully Forrester, but in Bingham's cabin he found another and a box of cartridges. Shoving them into his pocket, he regained the deck to hear Jackson bawling for him.

"Dude! Git into that boat—where the hell are ye?"

"Coming!" sang out Blake.

"Hustle your rats! Over with you!"

Blake dropped into the boat, hearing the whine of young Boston at his elbow. Above them stood the figure of Jackson, a black blur in the main rigging.

"Give way, you fools!" cried Jackson, his voice shrill with excitement. "Give way! Give way! Now laugh, Steelfist, curse you!"

And, as the boat shoved off, there came a low, muffled roar. The Marshall's tall masts and rigging quivered against a red flame; her whole structure seemed to plunge on end like a sounding whale; the roar burst into a racking explosion that sent Blake down amid his shrieking men as the boat rocked and reeled.

Howard had exacted a terrible vengeance!

CHAPTER XIV.

SWITCHING COMMANDERS.

DARKNESS, intense and terrible—and the screams of men.

Came shots and yells from the beach, with Howard's deep bellow calling on Blake

to hurry. In the starlight Blake saw the masts of the Marshall projecting from the water, as his men began to pull mechanically.

But after the first horrible awe and realization, there came swift reaction. Hardened as these men were, wholesale murder was far from their hearts. The bowman suddenly gasped, then flung his oar across the gunwales and broke into a screaming sob.

"Gawd's vengeance on the cursed job! There's a floater—let them murderers ashore fight it out—I'm done, I am!"

A rough chorus of approval heaved up, and the men stopped rowing. Young Boston began to pray. Some one struck him down with an oath.

"That ain't no floater—he's alive!" cried Sullivan.

The body which had struck the bowman's oar swirled in between the halted blades and reached for the gunwale.

Blake leaped forward and helped draw the man inboard. As he fell over the thwarts, sobbing something, an exclamation broke from the men.

"It's Ole! It's the Finn!"

Blake helped the man sit up. Ole seemed quite unhurt, and gazed into his face with sobbing recognition.

"Who went ashore?" demanded Blake sharply. "Speak quick, now!"

The old fear of authority fell upon Ole, and he shivered.

"All but me an' de mate an' t'ree more, sir. Ay—"

A long and furious bellow rose from Howard, followed by two more shots and a chorus of yells. Evidently there was a desperate battle going forward. Young Boston suddenly rose with a shrill cry.

"Dude, we ain't goin' to help them pirates! You take us out o' here an' we'll stick to ye, won't we lads?"

"Sure thing!" rumbled a hearty response. "Say the word, Dude. We're all with ye, sir!"

"Der bo'sun," spoke up Ole Kafban, "an' Paddy Ryan an' mabbe odders is full oop o' fightin', Dude. I come too if ju help Miss Pebbody."

Here was the crucial instant, and Blake seized it.

"Men, will you stand by to help Miss Peabody. Say aye, and we'll beat these murdering ruffians at their own game."

"Aye!" growled the men.

"Good. Give way!"

The oars dipped, and Blake turned the boat toward the northern headland, running parallel with the beach. The two crews were still engaged in furious battle, Marshall cursing his men and Howard cursing everyone impartially; by the sounds, the fight was setting toward the southern headland.

Blake suddenly finding himself in command of ten men, was no less swift in grasping his best plan of campaign. From Marshall's attempted parley earlier in the evening, he comprehended that nothing had been found in the sunken wreck; this would indicate that Marshall had taken his crew ashore to make a thorough raid of the island.

First, therefore, thought Blake, he must reach the bungalow and communicate with Wicliff. Then to capture the almost undefended Foster, get what recruits he could from Steelfist's crew, and the two skippers would be forced to come to terms.

With the Marshall blown up and the Foster in his own hands, the game was won, it seemed.

Bidding the men wait, Blake leaped ashore as the bow grounded. He ran up the path to the bungalow, calling out Wicliff's name as he went, but there was no answer. To his surprise and dismay, he reached the bungalow to find it deserted as before, but this time there were clearly no natives in the bush.

Striking a light, he found that the bungalow held no weapons at all, and so went back toward the boat, cogitating. This unlooked for desertion meant a change of plan.

"All right, men," he called softly, reaching the beach. "Ole, you lay ashore here with me. Young Boston, if I give you a gun can you capture the Foster and hold her?"

A hearty growl of assent went up from the men. Blake handed over his revolver to Boston when the voice of Sullivan reached him.

"I kin get some o' them Marshall bullies to jine us, Dude! Say the word, an' I'll lay up along the beach till I see the bo'sun or Ryan."

Blake reposed no confidence in Sullivan; yet, if the man wanted to join Howard, it was best to let him go. If, on the other hand, he kept his word, so much the better.

"Hop along with you, then," said Blake,

and Cutlip promptly splashed away and vanished. "Now, Boston, you get the Foster and hang on to her, see? You can hold off any boat-attack. Ole and I will hold the bungalow, with any recruits we can get from the Marshall's crew. I'll get in touch with the natives to-morrow, and we'll take these murdering skippers back to 'Frisco in irons. Give way!"

With a hearty mutter of encouragement, the men dipped their oars, and were gone.

Sullivan had slipped into the lantanas and vanished. With the Finn waiting patiently, Blake stood in silence for a moment, considering.

All sounds of conflict had died away along the beach. What had become of Bully Forrester and the other men blown up with the Marshall, Blake neither knew nor cared; he was more anxious about the outcome of the fracas between the skippers.

"Come along, Ole," he said at length. "We'll investigate our friends yonder."

With the Finn at his heels, he struck into the bush and started down toward the south headland, cautiously enough. Snaky lianas brushed his face like ghostly fingers, palmettoes squeaked and rustled as they chafed together; from the shore came the slap-slap of waves, but there was no sound of the presence of men.

At an opening in the bush, Blake found himself opposite the dim bulk of the ship; the moon was just dipping over the horizon. With a word of caution to Ole, Blake crept to the edge of the lantanas and peered out.

Just below him, at the lip of the tide, two empty boats rose and fell gently. Advance farther, he dare not.

With a suddenness that hurt, Jackson's voice drifted over the lagoon, followed instantly by a little burst of shots and a wild yell. Once more the mate's voice rose, but this time in a long scream that was cut short.

Blake caught his breath sharply—the Foster had been taken, and Jackson had there met his end.

"What the devil is that slimy Dude up to!" rang out a deep voice twenty feet away, and Howard loomed against the sky, cursing.

Marshall's grating laugh swept up.

"Look's like a hurrah's nest, Howard—"

"Curse you, is this some o' your work?" snarled Howard. Steelfist remained invisible to Blake, but other forms of men blotted out the stars.

"Cut out the cursing, you hoary old fool!" exclaimed Steelfist. "The Dude's euchred you, blast him—this ain't no time for us to be fighting! Get busy, now. You blew my ship up, and you've lost your own. It's the Dude against both of us, and we've got to pull together."

"And you cut in on the loot, eh?" grated Howard in fury. "Passage home for you—that's all! You're licked, Steelfist, licked good!"

"Oh, are you sure 'of that?" Marshall laughed again. "How about my mate, Bower, eh? He an' his men are scouring the island for the girl an' the Gospel-shark, an' they ought to get here pretty quick. Bower's got the rifles, too."

At this information, Blake stiffened where he crouched.

"You're a handy liar, Steelfist," returned Howard, but there was doubt in his voice. "I got you licked right here—"

"If you think so, start scrappin' again!" taunted Marshall. "There's no loot unless I share fifty-fifty, see? Where d'ye think you'll find it?"

"What d'ye mean?" demanded Howard. "What's your foxy trick now?"

"It takes no trick to know that anything what was ever in that old wreck ain't there now, you fool! Didn't I tell you that this evening? The old hymn-singer's got it, blast him! If Bower don't round him up, we'll go through his house. Fifty-fifty—speak up quick!"

Howard stood silent for a moment. No sound came from the Foster.

"I don't trust you any more'n I would a rattler," said Howard grudgingly. "But I guess you're right. We'll split even. If we don't find nothing—you stop here, savvy? And I'm in command."

"Take you," snapped Marshall with a chuckle. "Tell what's left of your rats, to hustle over here, an' give us a lead yourself."

Blake turned swiftly and caught the Finn's shoulder.

"Ole, you stay around and watch those fellows. If you get a chance, cut out the bo'sun, Paddy Ryan, or any one else you can trust, and bring 'em to the house. I'm going back there. Understand?"

"Ay got ju, Dude," nodded Ole confidently, and Blake crawled away hurriedly.

From the condition of the bungalow he knew that Long Rube's party could not have come that way. Therefore Bower,

who must have been sent ashore shortly after dark and in absolute silence, had probably landed at the south headland and had begun to sweep the island from that direction. His whereabouts was now a mystery.

Since no sound of shots had lifted from across the island, Blake felt convinced that Wicliff was still keeping the natives out of a fight, though probably aware of Bower's presence.

Gaining the bungalow, he found it as before—deserted, more silent than the silent night outside. But as he stepped heavily to the veranda and felt for a match there came the slightest of rustles, the sound of a sharply caught breath—and again silence.

Blake stood stock still, his mind leaping to Bower. Was an ambush planted here? Had Long Rube's party circled the island? He cursed his own ignorance of that expedition, which had caused him to give his revolver to Boston.

He could descry nothing in the pitch blackness of the room before him. Lips clenched, he took a step forward—"click!" A weapon had cocked, somewhere.

"Hold up, Bower!" he exclaimed sharply. "This is Blake—I've taken the John Foster, and now we'll talk terms."

For an instant longer there was tense silence. Then—

"Oh, thank God!" breathed a voice, and something brushed into his arms. "I—I was afraid—"

"Mary Peabody, by the Lord Harry!" he ejaculated softly, holding the slight figure to him. "Why, girl—where did you come from? Here, come out on the veranda and tell me about it. Where's Wicliff?"

Despite her half-hysterical laugh of protest, he lifted and carried her to one of the Singapore chairs. Then he took the cocked revolver from her hand and carefully lowered the hammer.

Her fingers clung to him for a moment and loosened.

"I've been at the village," she said, forcing quiet into her voice. "Mr. Wicliff was gone with the men—I don't know where. One of the women ran in with word that strange men were coming, and—and I ran this way. I had just got in the house when I heard you coming—"

"And here I am," smiled Blake. "Did the women scatter?"

"Yes—they had some place to hide, but

I was too frightened to do anything but come here. Silly, I know—"

"Not at all," said Blake quietly. "The point is, that this is no place for you to stay. Here's the situation—"

He told what had happened on that eventful day, sparing nothing, and questioned her in turn. Under the spell of his steady, even voice she quickly regained her own poise, and when her hand touched his arm again he found it without a tremor, while her own voice became cool.

When the Marshall was blown up Wicliff had been at the village with the men. At the explosion they had started off into the bush, and had not been seen since. The party under Bower had arrived unexpectedly, and apparently without molestation from Wicliff.

"Then," said Blake, "the best thing you can do is to go up to that hut where I was hidden yesterday—do you know the place?"

"I know it. You think Marshall and Howard are coming here?"

"Most certainly. I—"

Blake whirled at a crackle from the path.

The moonlight was filtering into the clearing by this time, and at the entrance of the trail to the beach he caught sight of a dark figure. He lifted the revolver, but as he cocked it, the figure cried out quickly.

"Don't shood! Vos dot you, Dude?"

Blake recognized the Dutchman's voice.

"That you, Dutch? Step for'ard here, and quick about it! Who's with you?"

The Dutchman advanced and showed himself to be alone.

"I met dot man Ole," he panted. "I want to pay Marshall for some liddle t'ings. I'm vit' you, Dude! Ole, he's comin'."

Another figure crashed forward, joining the Dutchman. Blake lowered his weapon with a breath of relief.

"Come along, Ole—both of you. Miss Peabody's here."

The girl stepped to his side, and the two men stood before them, staring and grinning sheepishly.

"Mr. Blake has told me all about you, Ole," said the girl softly. "I want to thank you for sticking up for me—you're a good man, and I'm glad to call you my friend."

The old Peabody blood stirring within her, the girl said neither too much nor too little—but just enough to send the Finn into a glow.

"Ay go hell fer ju, Miss Peabody," he returned, with earnest embarrassment, and

his hulking figure straightened a little. "Ay go hell for save ju!"

And none of those who heard him knew how he was to make good that word before the night was out.

"We've no time to spare, Miss Peabody," and Blake turned. "Take Ole, please, and go up to that grass hut at once. No matter what happens, you stay there! Ole, I'll trust you to take care of Miss Peabody—go at once, please!"

She put out her hand to him, and for a long moment his eyes held hers in the semi-darkness.

"Thank you, Mr. Blake. Good night!"

A moment later she was lost in the gloom of the bush, and the Finn with her. The Dutchman stood uneasily, waiting.

Blake looked down at the lagoon, now resplendent with the moonlight; every tiny wavelet bursting over the reef was tipped with silver, while the John Foster lay tall and silent, a fairy toy of shimmering light and shadow, outlined in silvery light from rippling waterline to the frayed dogvanes at her soaring trucks.

From where Blake stood the line of curving beach was invisible.

"Got any matches, Dutch?" asked Blake, turning. "Good—then rummage around the house here and get some kind of weapon. I'm going down the path and see what's doing. You've heard nothing of Bower's party?"

The Dutchman shook his head, and Blake strode down the path that led to the beach. He was not yet in sight of the circling sands when he halted abruptly at the low growl of voices ahead. Purposely, he snapped a twig, his revolver ready.

"Who's there?" sang out a voice.

Once more Blake breathed relief.

"It's Blake, bo'sun! Marshall with you?"

"Divil a bit," returned the tones of Paddy Ryan, jubilantly. "We're with ye, Dude, me lad! Me an' Fancy Harry an' the Bottle Heaven an' two more—we're with ye, matey, an' we've skipped that murderin' Steelfist fer good."

A shadowy group of figures filed into view on the path ahead, then the voice of the bo'sun came to Blake anew.

"It's lucky for this here Sullivan ye spoke up prompt, Dude! We had a notion the frowsy dog was misleadin' us with his lies, an' my knife was ready for him. But all's well, mate—exceptin' that Marshall an'

Howard an' their gang are comin' hell-bent for election, right behind."

"How close?" queried Blake, meeting the dark figures and shaking hands all around, even including Sullivan in his delighted greeting, for he was overjoyed that the man had played fair.

"We cut out o' the bunch when they was startin', an' run ahead," explained Ryan. "Got any guns?"

"One for myself—come along," and Blake turned. "If we can lick that gang before Long Rube shows up, we're all right."

CHAPTER XV.

WHERE THE TREASURE WAS.

SEVEN men at his back, the clearing flooded with moonlight, the path beyond obscured and dark—Blake made his dispositions quickly.

He posted the men at the edges of the clearing, in a circle, and ordered them to show themselves only at the bo'sun's whistle. Fancy Harry he retained on the bungalow veranda, and the two men lighted their pipes for a short smoke.

"How many men with Bower, bo'sun?"

"Six, Dude. They got all the rifles. We had a devil of a scrap out on the beach, after that condemned Howard blew up the Marshall! Besides us, there's only eight left, an' the two skippers. Was that you took the Foster?"

"Young Boston," explained Blake. He began to narrate what had happened, when a low warning hail from Paddy Ryan cut him short.

"I hear the skipper cussin', Dude!"

Blake and Lovell knocked out their pipes and waited, tense.

A moment later the sounds of men crashing through the bush became clear—seamen are not made for such work. The opening of the path blurred and darkened with grouping figures, which did not venture into the light of the clearing.

For a long minute no sound broke the silence—Blake's men kept quiet, the attackers were evidently reconnoitering. Then two huge shapes moved out into the moonlight, and Blake saw Howard and Steelfist Marshall side by side.

In each skipper's hand was a revolver, and Howard's was an automatic. Blake noted that fact swiftly.

"No one here," spat out Marshall. "Come on, boys!"

Blake moved forward to the steps, where he was still in shadow.

"That's far enough, Steelfist," he ordered quietly. "I've got you covered, and my men are all around you. I've got the Foster, too. Want to make terms?"

"No, you cursed liar!" roared Howard. "Come on, boys!"

"Stop or drop!" cried Blake grimly.

The only answer was a yell from Marshall, and the group of figures dashed forward. Steelfist's revolver spat fire—and as it did so, Blake threw down on Howard's massive bulk and pulled trigger.

"All right, bo'sun!"

Lovell's whistle shrilled out. Howard fell with a single gasping curse, and Marshall tripped over him.

Before Steelfist could gain his feet Blake's men raised a wild shout and charged, the Dutchman leaping in first of all on Marshall himself, and knocking away the latter's revolver.

One of Howard's men knifed the Dutchman twice, in the back. Blake shot the man dead—and up staggered Steelfist Marshall, spitting blood and curses, lashing into the thick of the fight.

Blake thrust his revolver away and bored in. He reached Marshall just as the deadly steel hand knocked Lovell sprawling, and staggered the skipper with a straight punch to the jaw. Marshall whirled, Blake drove his fist home again, and the skipper reeled back.

The fight was over, however. Panic-stricken by the ring of men leaping out on them from the darkness, the attackers broke blindly for the shore and Marshall, though wild with fury, smashed his way after them and was gone, still roaring curses.

Blake was content to let him go, and called in the men from any pursuit.

Picking up Howard's automatic, he found the clip full, and passed his own half-empty weapon to Ryan. The revolver knocked away from Marshall he handed to Fancy Harry, and then proceeded to take stock of damages.

Though short, the battle had been sickeningly bloody.

The Dutchman was dead, knifed twice to the heart; the Bottle Heaver lay inert, a boat-stretcher resting on his skull. One of the attacking seamen had been shot by

Blake, while Sullivan returned with a ferocious oath and exhibited a bloody knife which had accounted for another in the pursuit.

Howard, the first victim, was the only one who still lived. He was shot through the chest, and was quite conscious but unable to speak; his glittering, pig-like eyes gleamed up at the surrounding men so venomously that Blake shivered in disgust, and Paddy Ryan crossed himself furtively.

"Carry him into the house, two of you," commanded Blake. "Bo'sun, you'd better lay down to the shore-end of that path and give us warning of any further attack—but I don't think there'll be any. Paddy, you come with me; the rest of you keep a sharp lookout, for Bower's gang isn't very far off and those shots will draw him. I'll be back soon enough."

Howard was as helpless to move as to speak, and once laid down inside Blake saw that his wound was a fatal one—the man's tremendous vitality alone held life in him. With a nod to Ryan, Blake left the house and strode off up the path that led to the grass hut.

It never occurred to him that he had virtually left Cutlip Sullivan in charge of the bungalow.

With Ryan at his elbow, he quickly climbed the path to the hut. Ole was keeping good guard and challenged him at the edge of the banana grove. Leaving Paddy Ryan with the Finn, Blake passed on toward the hut and found Mary Peabody waiting, anxious-eyed.

"What's happened?" she queried.

"Nothing particularly," laughed Blake. "Marshall and Howard tried to bump us, and we scared them off with a few shots. Everything all right up here? Any sign of Wicliff?"

His strong face was very quiet and composed in the soft moonlight, which struck the grimness out of it; but the moonlight could not banish the look that had come into his eyes, at the sight of her.

"Yes, all's well here," replied the girl, a tinge of color creeping into her face. Yet she met his eyes steadily. "Was any one hurt? We've seen no one here."

"We hurt Captain Howard," said Blake, glossing over the details. "Let's have a look at those fellows—that's one reason I came up here."

Although the house was hidden, from the hut they had a clean sweep of the lagoon

and its curving halfmoon of beach, now flooded with moonlight.

By the two boats on the shore was clustered a group of men—Marshall and his followers. Farther down, toward the southern headland, Blake made out a third boat, and realized that it must have been that used by Bower. Therefore, his theory had been correct.

"What's that?" The girl gripped his arm suddenly.

Blake turned to where the Foster lay limned in black against the silvern sea beyond. From the ship was drifting a swinging, rousing chorus, hoarse-throated as if given tongue by men who had drunk too well—the old hauling-chanty that was sung when Bluff King Hal ruled Merrie England.

"Oh, haul the bowline, Katy is my darling,
Oh, haul the bowline, the bowline *haul!*"

"Oh, haul the bowline, London girls are towing,
Oh, haul the bowline, the bowline *haul!*"

"Oh, haul the bowline, the packet is a-rolling,
Oh, haul the bowline, the bowline *haul!*"

Blake grunted, his gray eyes narrowed.

"H-m! They've broken into Howard's locker, evidently. Hello!—Looks as though Marshall were up to tricks!"

The group by the two boats had suddenly leaped into activity, for that chanty must have carried to Steelfist, who could easily guess the cause thereof.

Watching with growing anxiety, Blake saw the men run out both boats and leap in. It seemed that Marshall was about to make a bold stroke for the John Foster, but if so, that stroke was halted almost as it began.

Spats of fire broke from the Foster's rail, and the lagoon echoed to the crack of rifles. Beyond a doubt young Boston's men were drunk, for they poured a hail of lead toward the two boats, firing as fast as they could pull trigger.

None the less, they must have made things altogether too warm for Marshall. The bowman in one of the boats crumpled up, another man screamed out shrilly, and the boats foamed back to shore hastily.

"Good for Boston!" laughed Blake, as the firing ceased. "Drunk or not, they have rifles and won't allow Steelfist Marshall within hailing distance. Confound it, I wish we had those guns!"

The situation did not lack a certain element of rough humor, for, realizing that they had effectually repulsed Marshall,

young Boston's crew roared out an adaptation which must have stung Steelfist to the quick:

"As I was a-walking down Paradise Street,
Good-by, fare-ye-well! Good-by, fare-ye-well!
Ol' Steelfist Marshall I chanct for to meet—
Hurray, my boys, we're outward bound!

"Says he, I've lost my ship an' crew,
Good-by, fare-ye-well! Good-by, fare-ye-well!
The Dude has lammed me black an' blue—
Hurray, my boys, we're outward bound!"

There was more of it, but of such a nature that Blake turned hastily, his face very red, and led the girl outside into the moonlight, over the lip of the crest.

"There's no danger of their sailing away?" asked the girl quietly.

"Hardly! They could kedge or tow out, and couldn't navigate when they got out. No, the Foster is safe enough. All that worries me is Long Rube Bower and his sweet gang of cut-throats. And where can Wicliff be? By the way, Marshall's presence ashore, as I told you, is due to the fact that he found the wreck empty of treasure. Has Wicliff ever mentioned it to you?"

For a moment she looked up at him, then smiled.

"Yes, Mr. Blake—"

"You mean Jack," and Blake smiled in turn. "Mary's ever so much more suitable than Miss Peabody—so go on about the treasure."

"Yes, Jack," she nodded, her eyes twinkling. "He spoke about it to me when I first came ashore. He had recovered the money years ago, and several times wrote to find any of my grandfather's heirs who might be alive. As we never got the letters, however, he never got any answer; so he put the money into a chest in the bungalow—"

"What!" exclaimed Blake sharply. "It's there in plain sight?"

"No, hardly! The chest is in the little cellar—just a hole reached by a trap in the dining-room floor. Mr. Wicliff showed me the money the day before I went to the village—what's the matter?"

For Blake had turned abruptly, his eyes hard.

"I'd better get back to the house in a hurry," he rejoined. "Those fellows will be prowling around, and if they light on that treasure it's all up."

"Give the money to Captain Marshall, if he'll only—" began the girl.

"Nothing doing, Mary," snapped Blake, then laughed. "Knuckle down to that tough? I should say not! We're going to beat him, Mary Peabody—beat him at his own specialty, and then send you home with that money in your pocket. Now, take good care of yourself, and whatever you do, stay here. Good night for the present!"

"Good night, Jack!" she said softly.

But Blake was not destined to return to the bungalow so speedily as he wished. As he rejoined his two men Ryan plucked at his arm, and drew him on to the edge of the bluff, over the northern headland.

"Will ye be lookin' at that, Dude!"

Under the brilliant three-quarters moon the lagoon was as light as day. The wreck of the Marshall was indicated by her rigging, still above the water, for she lay in but six fathoms. A boat was just putting out from the Foster with ribald shouts.

"What'll be them dots in the old Marshall's fore-rigging, Dude?"

Blake made out three figures, evidently men.

"Ole wasn't the only one to escape, Paddy—I hope to Heaven Boston won't murder them!"

Paddy Ryan, to judge by his muttered curse, evidently did not second the wish.

It soon proved that young Boston had no murderous intents, however, despite his Dutch courage. The boat halted under the fore-rigging of the Marshall, and one by one the three figures climbed down. A jubilant yell, the oars flashed silver, and the boat headed back for the Foster.

"Here, Paddy," exclaimed Blake, satisfied, "I've got to get back to the bungalow. You follow this path," and he pointed out the trail which led from the crest through the banana groves to the village, "and see if you can't meet up with some of those natives. Long Rube's party ought to come from that direction. If you meet 'em, join in with the crowd unless you can get away; but see to it that I get warning, and that they keep away from the hut up here. Understand?"

Ryan nodded, wrinkling up his face anxiously, as well he might. There was no danger that Bower knew of his desertion, but the duty was none to his liking.

"I'll do me best, sir—what the devil's that?"

"Dude!" the voice of Fancy Harry rang out from below. "Hey, Dude! Git here in a hurry!"

There was a note of desperation in the tones that sent Blake plunging off down the path, wondering if by any chance the men could have found that chest of money. But they had found worse than money.

Blake reached the clearing to see the house blazing with light, while another cry from Fancy Harry ended with startling abruptness. It was followed instantly by the voice of Cutlip Sullivan.

"Urrk-uh-uh-urrrk! I'm Cutlip Sullivan, and I eats 'em alive—whooley!"

Darting to the door, Blake was in time to see the bo'sun reel across the room, crash into the opposite wall, and fall limply. Then he stared aghast at the scene which met his eyes.

CHAPTER XVI.

TORTURE.

THE bo'sun lay inert, while Sullivan stood over him, stretcher in hand, and flapped his arms grotesquely.

The Bottle Heaver and the remaining two men were stretched out on the floor half drunk; between them stood Wicliff's big sandalwood chest, smashed open. From this had been taken a brandy case, also smashed to flinders, and empty bottles rolled on the floor.

How long this silent orgy had been going on before Fancy Harry discovered it, there was no saying.

Head and shoulders resting against the wall, was the body of Howard, with Cutlip Sullivan's knife-haft protruding from his neck.

As Blake stared in horrified incredulity Sullivan turned and saw him. A torrent of blasphemy poured from the seaman's throat; swinging up his boat-stretcher, Sullivan leaped across the room with a roar, murder in his face. The other three seamen looked up in stupid, drunken mirth.

Blake sprang in, dodged the deadly sweep of the stretcher and swung to Sullivan's jaw with all his weight and fury behind the blow. The "cock of the fo'c's'le" threw out his arms and went down as if shot.

Catching up one of the rolling bottles, Blake crossed to the senseless form of the bo'sun, turned it over, and poured brandy into the man's mouth. It was all too plain that Wicliff had kept the stuff in the chest along with other medicines, and that the men had broken into it the first thing.

Being unhurt except for a crack over the head, Fancy Harry sat up and cursed for more brandy. Then he looked into Blake's ice-cold eyes and scrambled to his feet.

"The fools!" he cried, kicking the prostrate Bottle Heaver.

"You get back to your post," said Blake coldly. "I've got to get these fellows in shape to fight before Long Rube shows up. Skip along now!"

The bo'sun turned and vanished.

Leaving the murderer, Sullivan, where he lay, Blake seized on the other three seamen. He was in a cold rage at their criminal negligence in not staying at least passably sober, and without compunction he began to awaken them in fo'c's'le fashion, using foot and fist and voice as he had seldom thought ever to use them.

One by one he shot the three out through the doorway, then jerked Sullivan to his feet. Quite knocked out by Blake's one blow, the man was now coming to himself, and reeled out to the veranda. Blake kicked him down to the moonlit clearing with the others.

"You're a fine bunch of swine, you are—"

He was checked abruptly by a faint and apparently distant hail lifting above the trees, in the voice of Paddy Ryan.

"Look out, Dude! They're past me an' comin'—I'm off to get—"

"Dude!" came a roar from Lovell, down the beach path. "The skipper's sneakin' up on—"

As Blake leaped for the veranda, tugging out his revolver, he heard shots from the crest above—the crest where lay the grass hut, with Mary Peabody. The thicket of lantanas seemed suddenly to break out into voices of men.

"Get up here out of the light, you fools!" shouted Blake, at the half-stupefied men.

The Bottle Heaver and the others started to obey clumsily, but Cutlip Sullivan shook his fist in maudlin defiance.

"To hell wid ye, Dude—ye lop-eared—"

A rifle flashed out at the edge of the clearing, and Sullivan went down, coughing out his life.

Other rifles cracked; Blake heard the bullets ripping into the house all around him, and a wild yell in Marshall's voice answered by a burst of shouts from all sides. So, then, Bower had come!

"Use those bottles for weapons, men!" cried Blake, shoving the others inside. "Here they come—"

From the path across the clearing he saw Marshall's men breaking cover in a wild charge. When Marshall himself came into the moonlight Blake fired, and saw Steelfist go down.

Then men broke from the bush all around, surged on the veranda, and the darkness of the house was filled with a shrieking, cursing, sobbing riot of battle, where quarter was not asked or given.

Blake, knowing there was no escape, drew aside with a grim determination to make each of his shots tell. From six feet distant a revolver spat fire at him, and as the bullet nicked his ear, Blake caught the savage face of Long Rube Bower behind the gun.

He fired, saw the mate fall, and then was rushed back by knife-armed men. After that first volley, the rifles had been discarded.

In that moment the three remaining brandy-drinkers retrieved themselves nobly and well, swinging into the fray with knife and bottle—then the bellow of Steelfist Marshall rose anew, and Blake knew that the skipper was still unharmed.

Vainly he tried to get another shot at Steelfist; twice he shot down men who leaped at him, then a wild rush of bodies sent him to the floor and his revolver whirled out of his hand.

Blake came up, fighting like a demon, only to go down again, dazed, under the unseen blow of a stretcher. Before he could rise some one had leaped on him, a knee in his back, grinding him down and strangling him, and hearing the brutal laugh of Marshall above him, he felt himself tied hand and foot.

There was a shot, and the Bottle Heaver screamed. Then Steelfist's voice rang out again.

"Haul the Dude down to the beach, two o' you! I got use for him later. Lively, now! Where's Bower? Hey, Rube—"

As Blake was lifted and carried away, he could hear the skipper cursing like a madman over the mate's body, and smiled grimly to himself.

Five minutes later he was unceremoniously dumped in the sand near the two boats, and left to his own reflections. Finding that his lashings were too well tied to be loosened, Blake composed himself to await events.

He was under no illusions as to his present situation. Steelfist Marshall had not

spared him through pity, but through cruelty, and doubtless had some savage reprisal in mind. But what of Paddy Ryan and the bo'sun?

Fancy Harry seemed to have completely vanished. From Ryan's one shout of warning, Blake gathered that the little Irishman had slipped through Bower's party and was now desperately scurrying in search of Wicliff and the natives. That hunt, he reflected, promised to be vain so far as he himself was concerned.

He knew that Marshall must now be going through the bungalow; a moment later a wild yell of triumph that shrilled through the mass of jungle apprised him that the search must have been successful.

Blake gave vent to an inward curse.

"I wouldn't care so much for myself," he thought bitterly, "but if that old ass Wicliff had only hidden the loot properly, it might still be saved from Steelfist. What about Ole, I wonder? Those first shots I heard—"

With unhappy surmise fast growing upon him, he was interrupted by the arrival of two men, both bearing knife-wounds, who cursed and kicked him impartially. Both reeked of brandy, and Blake knew that what was left of the stuff had found its mark.

Then from the direction of the bungalow lifted a chorus—the short, snappy chanty used in furling the bunt of the heavy sails.

"Way-hay-hay—my old woman's a devil for gin—We'll pay Paddy Doyle for his boot!"

The reason for this was made clear a moment later. Down the beach came four men, each pair carrying the end of a long pole that disclosed itself as the rail of the bungalow veranda. In the center was slung a large chest, whose weight caused the four men to stagger.

Steelfist Marshall followed, a rifle in his hand. On closer approach, Blake saw a streak of blood on the skipper's cheek, which accounted for his first bullet. After him came the rest of the gang, singing and cursing and yelling.

Blake's first thought was that they had thoroughly looted the house, for they carried furniture, strips of rail, and in fact everything which could be moved or torn away. Then—Blake went sick as he looked.

For, marching between two men was a white figure which he knew instantly. It was Mary Peabody.

"Stow that chest in my boat!" snapped

Marshall. "There's more of it, bullies, an' when we've got it we'll—"

He was interrupted by a chorus of the men.

"Let's have a look at it, cap'n! Slim Jack can open her up—he's picked more'n one lock in his time!"

"All right, then—make sure," nodded Marshall. "An' keep that girl away from the Dude, blast you!"

Mary Peabody was halted on the other side of the group, and Blake caught her eyes fastened on him. But there was no fear in her face—rather sorrow and pity, and a hopeless bewilderment that sickened him anew.

Slim Jack, a grinning waterfront rat, knelt before the chest and fumbled with its locks. There was a click; after a moment, another; then a third click, and with a maudlin laugh the seaman raised the creaking lid. Marshall shoved back the men and leaned forward, then—

"*Sand!*" he roared, straightening up with such fury in his face that the men shrank back from him. "*Sand! Gawd—*"

For a moment his rage choked him, and in the silence Blake's laugh rang out. So, then, Wicliff had not been such a fool after all.

"Pile up that stuff!" foamed Marshall, raving curses like a madman. "Pile up that stuff, you blasted rats—lively! Tie up that girl—do the job right, you Slim Jack, or by Heaven you die here an' now!"

Under his threatening rifle and more threatening manner, the men leaped to his word in wild panic. Unresisting, Mary Peabody allowed two of them to tie her feet together. As with Marshall, the exultation of the men had given way to bitter fury on discovering that their gold was but sand.

When he saw the girl seized Jack Blake also went mad, and writhed in his bonds unavailingly, until Marshall's vicious curses turned to a terribly ominous laughter that was drowned in a sudden crackle of wood.

Not far from the boats, and close to the group, was that same tangled mass of driftwood which had hidden Foster's boat from Blake. It was now low tide, and the mass had washed up to high water mark.

One of the men had touched a match to the tangle, and over it the rest were now heaping the bungalow loot—chairs, veranda rails, smashed table, doors. As it began to flame up, Steelfist turned and his boot thudded into Blake's ribs.

"Now, my bucko, we'll have some talk out o' you! Want to taste that fire? Then loosen up! Where's the gold, huh?"

Realizing at last the meaning of that fire, Blake went cold with horror and fear of the savage who leered down at him.

Save for the brisk crackle of the flames the night seemed charged with an awful stillness. The moon was fleeced with clouds, and a faint rising breeze soughed insistently through the bush and the crested lantanas.

From windward the deep ocean swell surged in, breaking against the lower cliffs with slow, thunderous resonance. The John Foster had become quiet.

"Speak up!" snarled the skipper, giving Blake another kick. "Where's that loot stowed?"

"I don't know," and Blake writhed under the pain. "But I'd give a good deal for five minutes bare-handed with you!"

Marshall glared, his eyes bloodshot and red in the fire-glow, half-hidden brutality flashing out in every line of his powerful, wolfish features. Then he turned to his men, who were crowding in with brutish eagerness for the spectacle.

"Two o' you men lay out along the beach, with rifles—one each way. Sharp, you swine! Keep watch, or I'll flake ye! Where's that cursed Paddy Ryan? Any o' you lads do for him?"

"We met him up in the bush, sir," spoke up one of Bower's men. "Said he was—"

"Yes," raved Steelfist, "an' then he let out a yell for Dude, huh? No, you didn't know better'n to let him pass, drat ye! An' the bo'sun—anybody seen him?"

Nobody had, it appeared.

Blake looked at the girl, met her eyes, and groaned to himself. He was helpless, unable to move, and the look in her eyes, the dread pallor of her features, the brave hopelessness with which she held herself erect and unflinching—all these told him that she knew nothing of the gold, yet knew that Steelfist would never believe that she knew nothing of it.

"She's a brave heart—a brave heart!" thought Blake, watching her, fascinated. "Marshall knows it, too, and he'll think her lying—oh, the devil, the cursed devil! If I could get rid of these lashings for half a minute!"

But he could not.

With his sentries posted, and secure, as he thought, from all possible attack, Steelfist turned his attention to his prisoners.

The beach was flung into brilliant radiance by the licking tongues of fire; the brutal ferocity of the skipper was reflected in the faces around him. The scum of the two ships had clung to Marshall, and brandy and gold-lust had turned them into beasts.

"Now, my suckin' doves," and Steelfist leered wolfishly, "where's the gold that ought to been in that chest, huh? Speak up, Dude, or taste fire!"

"Go look for it, you dog!" snapped Blake, knowing that protests of ignorance were of no avail.

Marshall swung toward the girl.

"You, Mary Peabody! Want to see your fine friend toasted, huh? Then talk out an' do it lively! Where's the loot?"

"I do not know," said the girl quietly, holding herself very erect and firm.

"All right, curse you! Here—two o' you bullies shove the Dude into the embers over there—no, leave his boots on."

Two of the men seized Blake and thrust him forward, then tripped him up and shot him along the ground, feet first, into the heat of the fire. He heard a choking cry from Mary, as the embers and half-burned tangle covered his feet and ankles.

"Take him out—for God's sake don't do this! I'll give you the money—anything you want—"

"Out with him, bullies!" roared the skipper.

With the heat drawing a stifled groan of agony from him, Blake was dragged away from the fire; the men set up a yell at this evidence of the skipper's seeming success.

"Spit it out!" bellowed Marshall to the girl. "Where's the stuff? Out with it, or back he goes an' you with him!"

White-faced, stark with horror, she stared at him.

"I don't know where it is now," she broke out, "but I'll promise that Mr. Wicliff shall turn it over to you—you shall have the whole thing—"

"More o' your blasted lies!" screamed Marshall, his face that of a madman. "I'll learn ye to lie to me! In with 'em, bullies—move, curse you!"

Even the men hesitated at this order, but under a flood of oaths from Marshall they seized Mary Peabody and thrust her forward. Now Blake loosened his lips, and poured out his rage on Marshall, his words biting deep until the skipper's face swept with new passion.

"In with 'em!" he bellowed furiously. "Let 'em warm their feet at the same fire an' we'll get truth out of 'em—"

"The girl's gone, sir," spoke up a man, and the others hesitated.

Mary had fainted.

Marshall raised the rifle which he still held.

"Now," he yelled, "obey, you rats! Shove 'em in feet first, both together—an' do it lively!"

Blake felt himself gripped, and raved out incoherent curses. He saw Slim Jack lifting his feet for the fling, and—something long and thin seemed to flicker through the air.

Slim Jack dropped his feet suddenly and looked surprised, caught at the end of a shark-tooth spear that had gone clear through him, and fell forward into the fire.

CHAPTER XVII.

TO A FINISH.

BEFORE any of the watching group quite realized what had happened, a heavy coco-wood club flew from the edge of the jungle, struck Marshall, and sent him sprawling on the sand, his rifle flying away.

After the club came Fancy Harry Lovell, a stream of brown figures followed the bo'sun with a wild yell, revolvers cracked, and the fight was on.

In that first moment of torture Blake's ankle-lashings had been burned through. Now he tried to gain his feet, but fell back with a groan of agony; his burns effectually kept him out of the turmoil.

Some one gripped his shoulder, he felt himself dragged roughly over the sand; then appeared Wicliff, who had rescued Mary Peabody from the trampling horde. Holding the unconscious girl in his arms, he joined Blake, who lay watching.

No word was spoken; indeed, Blake gave the old missionary but a glance, for he was intent on the fight and was lending the encouragement of his voice to his own men—Ryan and Ole Kafban being with Lovell.

In that first moment, Marshall's men were all but overcome by the sheer surprise of the assault, and Ryan shot two of them mercilessly.

Then the skipper was up, and the terrible steel fist came into play. Ryan was knocked senseless. Ole came staggering blindly toward Blake, and dropped to the

sand groaning, a ragged cut from temple to chin.

"Into 'em, bullies!" roared Steelfist, setting the example.

Though it was long since Wicliff's natives had wielded spear and club, they evinced a lust for battle that staggered the seamen. There was no chance for rifles, save as clubs; the natives had surrounded the party from the ships, cutting them off from the boats; and, though but a dozen in all, followed the lead of Fancy Harry nobly.

Desperate, the seamen whipped out knife and clubbed rifle, and fought for their lives. Lovell, revolver in hand, went down under the rush. A stalwart native smashed down a seaman with a huge club and drove in at Steelfist; the skipper leaped nimbly aside, whirled, and sent his terrible right from the shoulder.

As the native crumpled up and fell in a heap, a wild snarl of triumph broke from Marshall.

"Into 'em, lads—knife the cursed rats!"

Blake turned his head, desperation in his eyes, and sought the John Foster. He prayed that young Boston would come—but the lagoon was silent, empty of boats. Boston and his men were either drunk or heedless of the fracas.

There came a crack and a rifle-flame thirty feet away; the two sentries sent out by Marshall were coming in. So suddenly had the whole thing passed, that only now had they realized what was up.

Blake writhed up against the missionary.

"For God's sake, loose my hands!" he cried. "There's Ryan over there, knocked out—he must have a revolver about him, for I gave him one! Hurry up—loose me and give me a gun, Wicliff!"

Something like a groan broke from the gaunt missionary, but his trembling fingers worked at Blake's wrists.

"I have no strength," he muttered in Blake's ear. "I've been tramping with my boys all night, making sure all was safe—then we found Mary gone, and there was more searching—your man Ryan found us just in time—"

"Get me that gun!" cried Blake, as his hands came free.

Setting down the form of the girl, Wicliff obeyed. Even in the firelight Blake could see that the man had aged terribly since their last meeting, and must be very weak.

Searching Ryan, who had been flung out

of the fight, senseless, Wicliff found the revolver, and came back. Meantime, Marshall had been working havoc among the natives, his blood-streaked face like that of a demon; Lovell encountered him, stood up to him for a moment and slugged toe to toe—only to go down beneath a clubbed rifle from behind.

Blake lifted his revolver, coolly, his hand steady. He threw down on the rifleman running from the south end of the beach, and the man dropped to the shot. Turning, he picked off the man who had clubbed Lovell, and sought to get a shot at Steelfist.

But the skipper had heard those reports, and had learned their cause. He came around with a roar, turned his back on the fight and leaped at Blake, cursing as he came.

Lips compressed, eyes narrowed, Blake waited—he must be sure of his shot this time. When the raging Marshall was two yards away, he pulled trigger. The hammer clicked emptily—the last cartridge was gone!

Before Blake could move that steel fist had crashed into his cheek and knocked him sprawling on the sand.

He got to his knees, desperate with the agony of his burned feet, to see Marshall turn on the motionless Wicliff. Wild with pain and rage, Blake tottered up and fell on the skipper with one terrible blow flush to the jaw.

Steelfist reeled, came back, and Blake, unable to guard, caught a short-arm jab that hurled him down again. He was done, and knew it; sobbing with his very impotency, he dragged himself up to his elbow. But Marshall gave him no further thought.

"Now, you cursed gospel-shark," belowered the maddened skipper, "it's lights out for you an' this—"

And then came Ole.

Bleeding horribly from his jagged face-long wound, the Finn, who must have come to himself a moment before, rose from the sand. His peaked face and watery eyes gleamed with berserk madness, he mouthed inarticulate yells that were more horrible than words, and his sheath-knife glowed in the firelight.

Marshall heard those yells, and turned barely in time. Ole came in with a leap and a swift upward stab that had meant death to an ordinary man. But Steelfist, snarling, caught the thrust in the steel and leather harness of his right hand, and

wrenched the knife free. It fell at Wicliff's feet.

Swift as a flash Marshall stooped, caught up the weapon and slashed down at the white figure of the girl. The stroke went home—in the shoulder of the Finn, who had flung himself desperately in between.

"Ay pay ju oudt!" he screamed, rising.

"Look out!" yelled Blake in warning.

The maddened men were past all warning, however. There was a sickening thud as Marshall's steel fist drove home with awful force and crushed in the breast-bone of the Finn.

Sorely stricken, Ole staggered back, but his hand was tugging at the knife fastened in his flesh, and he tore it free. Then, with a sobbing cry of desperation, he flung himself bodily at the skipper.

Blake was dimly aware that Steelfist's mad fury had drawn all eyes toward him, that the fight was hanging fire; but he, with all the rest, was watching tensely the two men who gripped each other to the death.

Ole had fastened to Marshall's throat, careless of blows; his left hand was sunk like a claw into the powerful neck of his erstwhile torturer, and he was growling like some maddened animal.

"Blast ye—git away—"

The labored breath of the skipper whistled from his great chest as he fought to batter his clinging enemy loose; more than ever did Steelfist Marshall resemble a wolf in that moment, as he drew himself up and back, striving to get free of those gripping, death-clenched fingers.

Again and again his terrible steel hand crunched into Ole's broken body. The Finn's growl turned to a whining groan with the agony of his shattered breast—racking sobs burst from him.

Yet he held on; all his vitality seemed concentrated into one intense spark, destined to bore through Marshall's strength as a carbon point bores through chilled steel.

The horrible, wordless struggle had swift ending. The Finn's right hand came free of Marshall's clutch, and the knife flashed to the skipper's bent-back head. Death laid hold on Ole Kafban, and he fell under the last blow of the steel fist—fell like a limp thing, lying in a heap on the sand.

For an instant Steelfist Marshall stood upright, plucking at his throat. A cry of horror broke from some one, and Blake echoed it. From the skipper's mouth pro-

truded Ole's knife-haft—the blade had gone true, through mouth to brain. With never a word more, Marshall went to his knees, and then fell forward on his face, dead.

For one tense moment the watching men stood paralyzed, awed. A great scream rang out, and Marshall's men went to pieces; they fled into the bush, up and down the beach, shrieking over that they had seen.

Blake dragged himself forward. From the water came a sudden sound of oars, and a hoarse hail.

"Dude—hey, Dude! It's me, young Boston! Want us?"

But Blake did not answer. All things were dim to him, of a sudden; he heard Wicliff calling to the natives, and then found that which he had sought.

He lay motionless, pressing the hand of Mary Peabody to his brow, thanking God that she had not witnessed that last horror.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ONCE MORE AFLOAT.

"I THINK that the only brave man in all this mess has been Ole Kafban," said Blake, gazing at the shore.

"So?" Mary Peabody took his hand in hers, smiling a little as she drew his eyes to her face. "No, Jack dear—I think you're the bravest of all."

Blake looked at her in some surprise. In the three weeks which had elapsed since that terrible and memorable night, the girl had ever been the first to give to Ole Kafban his meed of tribute.

"Eh, Mary?" His gray eyes were puzzled. "You know that isn't—"

"You foolish man!" and she laughed swiftly. "Weren't you brave enough to marry me this morning? Be careful! There's Mr. Wicliff's boat coming out—and all these men—"

Blake drew back, smiling.

"Sorry you married me, Mary?"

She studied him for a moment, her eyes twinkling.

"No—not yet, sir!"

She flashed down the ladder to the gangway, as Wicliff's boat approached. Blake turned, his eyes narrowing suddenly at a voice behind.

"Mr. Blake—beggin' your pardon, sir, does Mr. Wicliff sail with us?"

It was a new Bully Forrester whom Blake eyed.

One arm, broken when the Marshall was blown up, was still in a sling; while two weeks in irons had not only completely broken the spirit of the bucko mate, but had brought to him the lasting realization that the erstwhile Dude was now master of the ship. Hence, Forrester had capitulated without honors, and Blake was seeing that he kept in that condition.

"I think he's come out to say good-by, Forrester. Go ahead—heave up short, and wait for the word."

The pitifully small crew sprang to the capstan, Fancy Harry Lowell taking second mate's position with a smirk of importance.

Jack shook hands with Wicliff, as the old missionary came forward.

"Glad to see you again, sir! Any word from those men that were with Marshall that last night? Are they still hiding out on the south headland?"

Wicliff nodded. "Yes, they're adrift down there still, but they're all right, Blake."

"Sure you don't want me to take them off for you?" smiled Blake. "I can land my men and rout 'em out in no time, in spite of their guns."

Wicliff's piercing blue eyes twinkled as he glanced from Blake to Mary, who had that morning become Mrs. Blake.

"No, I have use for them, and wish no more conflict."

"Come, man!" laughed Blake, puzzled. "What on earth do you expect to use them at? They'll resist arrest, and raid your fields—"

"Tut, tut, sir!" broke in Wicliff. "I am not too old yet to convert men, sir, and it seems those men are badly in need of it."

Blake's face went grave.

"You'll never do it, Wicliff, never in the world! They're waterfront sweepings, wharf-rats—why, no man on earth could put the fear of God into those scoundrels!"

The other nodded quietly.

"I quite agree with you there. No man could do it. But has it occurred to you that God might accomplish something of the sort Himself, in His own good time?"

Blake's eyes shifted to the rugged grandeur of the hinterland, glowing in the noonday sun. He nodded quietly.

"Well, I'll be off," and Wicliff took the girl in his arms, looked deep into her eyes, then pressed his lips to her brow. "God bless you, both! And remember, I can get letters twice a year!"

"We'll remember it, never fear," said Mary softly, as Wicliff shook hands with Blake and turned to the gangway. "Good-by! Good-by!"

"Anchor's apeak, sir!" snapped Lovell, from forward.

Blake signed to Forrester.

"Break her out, bullies! H'ist away tops'ls!"

The halliards were manned with a whoop, and Paddy Ryan started the chorus that jerked the main topsail aloft.

"Oh, come all you little yaller boys,
An' roll the cotton down!
Oh, a husky pull, my bully boys,
An' roll the cotton down!"

With her three topsails mastheaded and the fore-topsail laid to the mast, the cable was broken out, the fore-braces came in hand over hand, and the ship swung on her heel, leaning gracefully to the freshening breeze.

Blake stood at the poop rail, Mary's hand in his, and together they waved a last farewell to Wicliff's dancing boat. Bully Forrester approached and touched his cap.

"What port, sir?" he asked, grinning.

Blake looked into the girl's brown eyes.

"What port, captain?"

Their eyes met and held for a long moment. Then—

"Home, dear!"

THE END.

CONSTANCY

THERE is a love that perishes; and one
That shall outlast the glory of the sun.
Be mine the steadfast love that throbs each hour,
Nor wastes its beauty like some heedless flower.
Be mine the quiet service through all days,
Serene and well content in hidden ways,
Not that wild passion of a spendthrift June,
Wasted in ashes at Life's golden noon.

Charles Hanson Towne.

Twelve a Week Short



by

George Mariano

I.

WEDDING HOPES.

WHEN old Morrison made his god-daughter a wedding present of a cool two thousand dollars he unconsciously supplied a certain little undressed deity with the ammunition for another job in a fashion to put him beyond the limits of even the most benevolent neutrality.

You see, the aforesaid god-daughter was marrying Mr. Ashworth King, who had served Mr. Morrison faithfully for ten years in the capacity of buyer at a salary of twenty-five per. You see, also—or you shall see—that the best man at the wedding was Mr. Arthur Bannock, who had managed Mr. Morrison's factory faithfully for eleven years at a salary of twenty-eight dollars.

Mr. Ashworth King didn't mind a bit giving such of the wedding guests as might not know better the impression that he was a very valuable man. He saw to it that the check lay in plain sight on the table of displayed gifts.

To Bannock, who knew nothing of the god-daughter relationship, King even whispered that he wasn't yet too sure he hadn't earned that gift above his salary once or twice over—though it was sure the swell thing for the old man to do even at that.

Which set Arthur Bannock to figuring. If Morrison did thus much for a ten-year employee worth twenty-five a week, it stood

to reason the old man would do no less for an eleven-year employee worth twenty-eight.

Old Morrison rather clinched the matter when he crossed Bannock's path as Arthur was leaving the exhibition-room, slapped his manager on the back and jovially remarked:

"This is what you ought to do, Bannock!"

"I don't know but you're right," Bannock responded, the figures working hard in his brain.

For six of the eleven last years Bannock had been wishing he might get married. For all of those six years Miss Eleanor Jangreaves had been patiently waiting until he might get married. But how could he support Eleanor on twenty-eight per week in anything remotely resembling the comforts in which she was living?

A two thousand dollar start would certainly make a difference. Two thousand might not last a man a lifetime; but it could help a lot. Put it, for instance, into the five thousand dollar house on which he and Eleanor had been gazing longingly for the past eight months.

The owners wanted forty-five dollars a month rent for that house. If he paid down on it the five hundred he had saved up, he would have to keep on paying forty-five a month to a building loan association for years and years, not to mention taxes and other things that make property-owning miserable.

But if he paid twenty-five hundred for the place the balance would go as a straight mortgage; he could get it at five per cent. and indefinitely. The interest and taxes would not come to fifteen a month.

Arthur got Eleanor into a cozy corner before the bride and groom had been rice-pelted from the premises.

"Eleanor, what do you say to having our wedding next June or July?" he propounded. "I think I can see my way to it now."

"Well," was what she said, "I'm sure I never insisted that you be worth a fortune in money. I'd marry you any time, if you were a cart-driver earning ten a week. I don't have to have all the luxuries, and—"

Which was just the way for a sweetheart to talk, but which, quite properly, had never hitherto blinded him to the fact that her salary as principal of the Lincoln School was just two dollars better than his own.

The owner of that desired home of Arthur and Eleanor's refused to give a lease on the house. He would rent by the month; he would sell on easy terms. But a lease would tie up the place for a year.

So Arthur took five hundred of the six he had saved and paid it down, arranging temporarily for the balance at forty-five a month, including interest. Eleanor insisted then on using the four hundred she had saved to furnish the place.

Old Morrison rather disconcerted Arthur when, just two weeks before the wedding, he started on a business trip of indefinite duration, but of perfectly definite length to include the Panama Exposition.

Arthur would have appreciated it, had Morrison, in addition to arranging for his manager's honeymoon-vacation, sent his present in advance. However, Mr. Morrison could hardly forget the matter, and checks go easily by mail.

The wedding came at high noon. Even noons come high for weddings. Arthur had noticed that everything came a little higher than he had expected.

Just how he was going to get away with the proposed tour to the Maine Coast without biting a hundred off Mr. Morrison's two thousand dollar check was becoming a problem. And he wanted that check to go whole and unbroken into the house.

Even that would not have worried him so much had the check itself arrived promptly. Arthur had gone eight times to the home where his bride-to-be dwelt with her parents

—eight times since the low noon preceding the wedding high one.

Each time he had managed a surreptitious look into the room where the presents were being put on exhibition.

Each time he managed to hint something that would have given Eleanor opportunity to speak of receiving Mr. Morrison's check. She did not mention it.

At eleven fifteen he paid the ninth visit to the array of presents. Then he sought out Mrs. Jangreaves. Eleanor was being done up by a hairdresser, a dressmaker and a few others. Arthur had arrived early. There had been no previous chance to inquire since the nine o'clock mail delivery.

"Er," he faltered, "Mr. Morrison's present didn't come yet, did it?"

"I haven't heard any one say anything about it," the almost mother-in-law replied. "Is he sending anything?"

"Why—er—I don't know," Arthur stammered.

Mrs. Jangreaves bustled off about one of the thousand and odd things there are to do around a wedding. Arthur sat down; got up; sat down again. Mrs. Jangreaves came back.

"What time does the next mail arrive?" he inquired.

"He's supposed to get here at half-past eleven, or about that," he was informed. "But he's pretty apt to be later."

She meant the postman. Arthur hurried up to an empty bedroom and began to put the finishing touches upon his personal appearance.

"Great Scott!" he gasped, as he glanced into the glass, "I look as if I'd been on a bat last night. I didn't sleep much. I—why, there's a gray hair."

He jumped away from the glass. It was not the sight of the gray hair. A postman's whistle had sounded somewhere.

Finally he perceived that the whistle was being blown from house to house on the street behind the Jangreaves home. He sat down and smoked four cigarettes, one after another. The whistle lost itself in the distance.

Supposing Morrison should not send the check! Bannock wiped a big drop of perspiration from the left side of his forehead.

Of course, Morrison would send the check. Hadn't he given one to King? Hadn't he encouraged Arthur to get married? Of course—

"Hey, Artie—about ready? It's three

minutes of twelve." It was Bob Whitlock, Arthur's best man. Arthur got up with a jerk.

"Say, Bob," he asked, "has the postman passed yet?"

"I didn't hear or see him. Here, get into this coat. Everybody's arrived. Um-m-m-m—you look as if about two more weddings would send you to an untimely grave. But—there goes the march."

Arthur drew a long breath, pulled himself together, steadied his somewhat wobbly feet by holding the banister rail as he descended in Bob's wake.

The little cottage was fairly bulging with guests down-stairs. A row of camp stools had been set along one wall of the hall, narrow enough without them. Arthur bowed solemnly as he passed some of his best friends. Just as he reached the middle of the distance to the dining room where he was to join Eleanor and lead her to the improvised altar at the rear of the back parlor—

"Pf-f-f-i-i-it!" The postman's whistle blew.

Arthur started so that he nearly upset a stout lady balanced on one of the little chairs. He begged her pardon. She laughed.

The postman was all of half a block away. Arthur reached the side of his bride.

"How do you like me?" she asked, since he failed to comment on her lovely bridal array.

"Why—why—all right," he stammered, absently, his ears straining for another sound of the whistle.

He would rather have waited; but Bob and Edith Holcombe, the bridesmaid, pushed the happy pair forward. An instant later he was standing before the Rev. Jeremiah Blakeford, who was slowly reading:

"Wilt thou love her, comfort her—for-saking all others, keep thee only unto her, so long as ye both shall live?"

"Pf-f-f-i-i-it!"

Arthur forgot all about the answer, listening for the sound of the footsteps on the porch.

"I will," softly prompted both Bob and the minister at once.

"Yes—I will," Arthur mumbled. He wished Mr. Blakeford would read less sonorously.

No, the postman hadn't been in front of the gate! He couldn't have been.

"I, Arthur, take thee, Eleanor, to be my wedded wife," he was repeating, almost

word by word, after the clergyman; "to have and to hold!"

"Pf-f-f-i-i-it!"

Arthur's start loosened his grip on the bride's hand. She had been resting in that clasp just enough so that her hand dropped to her side. They got together again. The postman was nearer but not yet here.

Steps were passing the house—passing it! Were they the postman's? Arthur would have given an extra five dollars to the minister for the privilege of turning his head. But he was putting the ring into the minister's hand.

"Pf-f-f-i-i-it!" It happened as Arthur started to place the ring on Eleanor's finger. There was no mistaking the sound. It was three doors past the house at the very least.

The ring fell from his clasp. Bob made a quick move to stop the rolling thing with his foot. He kicked it under a heavy bookshelf.

Edith Holcombe giggled into her handkerchief. A snicker sounded from the seats immediately behind the happy pair. Eleanor was blushing furiously.

Bob got up from fishing out the ring with the cane one of the guests handed him. A horse and wagon clumped by, slowed, stopped.

Bob's face was very red. Arthur gripped the ring firmly; Eleanor hooked it with the proper finger of her left hand. And—

"Pf-f-f-i-i-it!" A pair of well-shod feet were clattering up the steps. Some one was taking the mail. Either Arthur had been mistaken, or the postman had had to come back with something missed. Was it Morrison's check?

"With this ring I thee wed, and with all my worldly goods——" It would make an awful difference as to the amount of those worldly goods, if—

Arthur suddenly realized that he was through. The Rev. Jeremiah Blakeford was through. Eleanor was looking at him in a way that—oh, yes, he must kiss her now. He did it fervently.

Everybody started to rush him with handclaps and congratulations. If only some one would tell him whether that letter was from Morrison! If only they would let him get to Mrs. Jangreaves to inquire!

But, as he found himself bobbed into Mrs. Jangreaves's presence, he saw that nothing of moment was upon her mind save the fact that her daughter was at last taken from her for better or for worse.

He kissed Mrs. Jangreaves and called her mother. Then he saw his own mother trying to smile at hearing him do it.

And then—

Eleanor's Aunt Bessie bustled out of the kitchen with a leather case in her hands. Aunt Bessie was informal by nature. Of course she should have gone up to the "presents room" without a word, to add the last arrival to the rest. But she didn't.

"Well," she cried, "here's another present. Just look at all this gorgeousness! The parcels postman just brought it."

She found room for the case in a spot between the plates set for the breakfast on the sideboard. She opened it up.

Arthur felt a sensation of deep disappointment. Before the next mail could arrive, he and Eleanor would be aboard the train for New York to catch their boat for Portland.

"Spoons galore!" laughed Aunt Bessie. "A whole dozen of each size. Enough to put a silver spoon into the mouth of each of your children and children's children unto the third and fourth generation. I didn't know there were so many kinds of spoons. It's from—"

But Arthur was already staring at the engraving on the card that lay upon the pink satin of the case's lining. The card, the room, the world seemed to whirl about his giddy head. Before her own name his employer's wife had written "Mr. and" to make the card read

Mr. & Mrs. Joseph Morrison.

Spoons!

II.

THE BONDS OF MATRIMONY.

"**S**ORRY, old man, I can't stay for the eats. I've got to be going."

Bob Whitlock was holding out his hand. Arthur took it dumbly. Vaguely at first his senses registered that the hand was cold and shaking perceptibly.

It was not the first time Arthur had got the vague impression that Bob was distinctly nervous this morning. And—

"Great Scott!" the bridegroom groaned inwardly, as his eye went back to that beautiful set of spoons—"what's he got to worry about?"

At that moment it seemed absurd to Arthur Bannock that any one else in the world should do any worrying. He had all the

grounds there were for worrying. There could hardly be any left.

And Bob was still single. Single! Oh, the bliss of it!

Fifteen minutes ago Arthur had been single. Now he was married. And he had married with the expectation of a two thousand dollar present; and the present had been some fifty dollars' worth of spoons.

Married to a woman who was a splendid school-teacher, who had never lived in a house where there wasn't at least one servant, whose knowledge of housekeeping began and ended with making fudge or Welsh rabbit in a chafing dish and percolated coffee to wash it down!

Married and tied up with a house that would cost him not less than fifty-five dollars a month to hold, not to mention the piano and the sideboard he had taken on instalments when Eleanor's furniture money ran out.

Eighty dollars of his monthly hundred and fifteen nicely, snugly contracted for! Thirty-five a month left to keep the house and buy coal in winter and ice in summer and meat and potatoes and bread and butter and car-fares and lunches and clothes, to pay a servant and for washing and laundry and a woman's hats and dresses and—

Bob looked worried and murmured congratulations, as he hurried out to his nifty little runabout! Bob worried! Congratulations!

Yes, Arthur wished he could get away up-stairs in the attic or somewhere, where he could adequately express to himself how big a fool he knew he had been.

To have done all this on the strength of Morrison's present to another man! It showed what being in love would do to a normally fairly average human intelligence.

Only, expressing it wouldn't help it a bit. Nothing can bring back the last minute to any man, or what he did in it.

It is recorded that the Almighty once stretched a day to enable the armies of His chosen people to finish a job; but He never yet gave back to any man a past minute to undo or do over again.

The time for Arthur Bannock to save himself from the irrevocable plunge into an impossible situation was fifteen minutes past. It's a great thought, that nothing, not even God Himself, can change the past. Sometimes great thoughts are very comforting—and then again, sometimes they aren't.

Impossible situation—that was the way to describe it. It was impossible to be in such a situation, to have to spend more money than you could possibly get. Yet Arthur Bannock was in it. And it was just as impossible now for him to get out of it.

He must go right on with this wedding trip up to the Maine coast. He must spend the money he had left, including two weeks' salary advanced, on a perfectly lovely good time, with the delightful certainty on the side that, when he had been back long enough to collect another two weeks' salary, amounting to fifty-six dollars, he would have payments to make amounting to sixty-four—not to mention the detail of getting three meals a day for self and wife in the meanwhile.

And the next weeks would be just as easy to solve as that—and the next and the next and the next and—

Well, just supposing for the sake of argument that he could keep this perfectly impossible game up for fifteen or twenty years, without any sicknesses, without any children, without any amusements, without—

No, it wouldn't let up even then. When he had the house half paid for and could get a steady mortgage at five per cent. on the other half, it would need painting and repairing; the borough fathers would run through a new sewer or repave or order new sidewalks.

He had married the only girl he had ever loved, the girl he had wished to marry for the past six years, the girl of his dreams, his hopes, his ambitions, his fondest desires.

But, if he saw a few more spoons, or a few more confounded bachelors like Bob Whitlock come around to congratulate him, he was dead sure that the imbecility that had led him into marriage would assume violent forms of stark, raving, howling madness.

It might have interested Arthur Bannock a little, had he been able to read the mind of Bob Whitlock while he was thinking the above-recorded bridegroom-y thoughts. It might interest the reader.

Anyhow, since Arthur would not do anything further, more interesting than to attempt to eat some sandwiches and a piece of cake, and even the rice-bombardment wouldn't begin for another hour and a quarter, we might just as well fasten our attention on Bob's mental and other activities to while away the moment.

"Darned fool!" Bobby muttered through

clenched teeth as he shoved up the spark of the runabout that had cost him twice as much as it ought to have cost—"what does he want to look as if he was viewing the remains at his own funeral for?"

"Maybe Eleanor isn't quite as pretty as two or three front-row dancing chickens I know; but she's one devilish fine woman, if you ask me. I wish I was marrying her—I wish—good God!—I wish I ever could hope to marry any decent girl like her.

"The big boob, the simp! I'd like to punch his head. What's he worrying about?"

"Damn him and his wedding! I wish I'd stayed at the bank. If—"

Whitlock didn't let himself think any further. He shoved up another notch on the spark, though he was leaving the speed limit two miles behind him every ten minutes already.

Twenty minutes after he had got away from the wedding festivities, he parked the automobile two blocks from the bank and walked the remainder of the distance.

He smoked up two cigarettes in the two blocks. Three doors from the bank's entrance he paused, and inhaled an enormous puff of smoke before throwing away the second butt. Then he squared his shoulders with a visible effort.

He was pulling himself together for the breezy, free-from-worry manner of entrance he immediately affected to the cashier's office. Nominally, and on the pay-roll, he was the assistant cashier of the Adamant Trust Company. Actually he did the work of the cashier, who had been a chronic invalid for three years, but had influence in the board of directors.

Bob Whitlock noted with satisfaction that the president and the secretary were out at lunch. Billy Ryan, the assistant paying teller, had just come in; Tom Whitney, the paying teller, was just going out.

"Hello, Bob," he called through the open door of the office, before Whitlock had got seated; "back already?"

"Yes," Bob drawled, "I ate a club sandwich that decided me against weddings forever. It made work look easy; so I thought I'd better get back and do some."

"Well, you'll find some to do. Lockwood, the real-estate man, was in here with a check from that big farmer, Thammers, up in Wickville. The check was for nine thousand dollars. Wanted me to certify it. But darned if we could find more than six thousand on the books.

"Lockwood said he couldn't understand it. He put up quite a fuss. So we let him telephone out to Thammers. And Thammers claimed he had his last statement to show he had ten thousand, four hundred and fifty here. And we haven't any checks against him this month.

"Charlie Duyme has been pawing over the books what time he wasn't tearing out his hair over it. He's up-stairs now, looking like a sick cat. If you know anything about it, for the Lord's sake tell him before he goes clean crazy. Something's all balled up."

Bob Whitlock had let himself into his chair. He steadied his hands against the mahogany top of his desk. He drew two long breaths before he could speak.

"Oh, he's just mixed something up, I suppose. You know there's I. C. Thammers as well as J. G. He's got them crossed somewhere, I reckon. I'll help him out after closing time. Nothing else exciting happen around here while I was out?"

He said it almost steadily, so nearly steadily that Whitney never noticed anything wrong in his voice.

And Whitney left Whitlock with a ringing in his ears, a feeling in his throat as if it were swelling shut, a dull pounding in the temples.

Just once in the next five minutes Bob's eyes dropped to the bottom drawer of the big desk. There was a first-class automatic pistol in that drawer. A year ago he had considered that pistol the implement wherewith to meet just such an emergency as now opened before him.

Since then he had hardened. Honor and self-respect had lost their hold upon him. He had got used to seeing himself as a thief, to excusing himself, and to the criminal's loss of faith in his fellows.

The brand and discredit and disgrace of a criminal worried less; the punishment was his only fear.

And the punishment, in these days of highly reformed prisons, seemed a long way easier than self-inflicted death. He had studied the sentences of thieving bank clerks.

Compared with Arthur Bannock's impossible situation, Bob Whitlock's would have looked to most men a thousand-fold more unendurable. But Bob had the tougher viewpoint, in the better as well as the worst sense of the word tough.

Bob had learned that no situation is un-

endurable or impossible. He had looked into the barrel of the pistol and decided that he was not too afraid to pull the trigger.

And he was not afraid of the alternative. He had planned for it. He would attempt no flight from the powerful arms of the American Bankers' Association. He would, when the time came, plead guilty and go to prison, playing on whatever mawkish sentiment of mercy he might be able to arouse in the judge.

"But," he had determined, "I'll get my term's worth out of it. As easy to die for a sheep as a lamb—it's a darned sight easier for a sheep to come to life again than for a lamb, if the sheep has grown his wisdom horns before he died."

All told, at that moment, Bob's defalcations were in the neighborhood of ten thousand dollars. He had made no attempt to steal any vast sum, so long as he had the run of the bank's vaults. But, with the prospect of that freedom and all other ended, he would provide for the future.

"Maybe I can string 'em along another month," he now concluded. "But it's time to get ready for emergency."

He got up from the chair, made his way into the vault. Soon he returned, a bundle of new ten-dollar bills in his hand.

"Here, Billy," he said to the assistant teller, "cash my check for fifty and pay me with these new ones. I hate dirty bills. I guess I'll go out for lunch, after all. Tell Charley Duyme I'll help him hunt up that Thammer business when I get back."

Bob went straight to the telegraph office four blocks away. He purchased a telegraph money order for ten thousand dollars and sent it to a broker in New York with order to purchase five hundred shares of U. S. Steel on a twenty-point margin.

Thence he made his way to his pleasant suite of rooms in a very unpretentious boarding-house. A certain bundle he stowed carefully behind register pipes that ran through a former fireplace to rooms above. Then he went back to the bank.

Bob was arrested three weeks later. He pleaded guilty, after two weeks out on bail, to a charge of embezzling ninety-five thousand dollars. All but ten thousand of it, he said, had been lost in stock deals, pool-rooms, at race-tracks and on general high living. Most of the ten thousand he helped the bank get back from a broker who had it as margin on U. S. Steel.

He got five years. At the end of that

time, unless his plans went sadly wrong, he would have the better part of seventy-five thousand dollars where he could lay his hands on it, to take with him to some distant city, to help him to forget and to keep others from noticing that he had ever been a jail-bird.

But here! We're getting Bob Whitlock and his worries a long way ahead of Arthur Bannock and the impossible situation he was in.

III.

TRYING THE IMPOSSIBLE.

WE might, however, bring Arthur and his impossible situation almost to the same period at a single jump, had it not been for the little impossible situation in which Mrs. Arthur Bannock was now finding herself.

She had thought she had known Arthur for the better part of their lives. There had been a time when she would have been better pleased had he seemed a little more eager to marry and a little less careful of the consequences.

That he had been willing to stretch their engagement for five long years because he flatly refused to attempt matrimony on his income had gone a bit hard with that romantic quality which belongs to every woman's nature.

But Eleanor was no longer a child. She had lived long enough to see several other people try matrimony on half what they needed to maintain the style of living to which both parties had been accustomed. She had come to appreciate and admire Arthur's good sense in waiting until he was in a position to avoid continual petty scrimping and squabbling over accounts.

She was hardly, however, prepared to discover that he had become a miser. His wedding seemed to have made him that.

She had never before seen him avoid tipping where tipping was customary. The steward of the boat had put himself out to make them comfortable on a rough night on the way to the Maine resort. The steward had made himself quite obvious as they were leaving. And Arthur had failed to tip the steward or any one else.

When they arrived a taxicab and a jitney were at the pier to take them to the quiet little hotel on Illiken Island. Arthur got her aboard the jitney, though she had to

squeeze to the edge of the seat between two other passengers and he had to stand. And he entrusted the bringing of their trunk to an expressman, though he must have known she wanted fresh clothes after the voyage.

Even this apparent niggardliness she could have borne better than the utter change in his attitude toward herself. It seemed to her that she bored him; he was having such hard work to pay attention to anything she did or said.

He was gloomy to the point of moroseness. Every attention he did show her was the result of obvious effort, as if he recalled occasionally that he must be nice to his wife.

Every hour of seven days made it plainer that he was unhappy in his marriage. Of course such unhappiness was essentially mutual. Eleanor grew to hate the resort and everything in it.

Since things had never been like that at home, she conceived an intense homesickness. She hoped he would cease to worry over expenses where they were not so extraordinary. Not having got much out of her dream of bliss during the week at the seashore, she dreamed again of a quieter, happier balance of the honeymoon in their own new house.

And Arthur snatched eagerly at the suggestion. They got home—and he made things worse than ever. Though he was on his vacation, though he could not have been at work if they had remained at the resort, he now insisted on going out on business every day and all day.

He got her a maid the first day. The maid was a Polish atrocity who knew neither English nor the first principles of any cooking either Eleanor or Arthur would eat.

"I think you won't have any trouble training her," Arthur said when he brought her home. "She's willing to work for ten a month."

Arthur agreed at the end of one meal—which Eleanor had tried to cook herself, though she did not admit it—that Tesla would not do.

It was two days before another maid was secured. Arthur was duly sympathetic over the wreck of an omelette and a steak burned to a crisp; but he committed the unpardonable tactical blunder of mentioning that the eggs had cost nearly five cents apiece and that it might be better to experiment on some cheaper cut of meat than steak at thirty-two cents a pound.

Then he brought home a Hungarian impossibility who knew how to cook and would do it for twelve a month. Marie knew how to cook boiled potatoes and an uncertain goulash. And Arthur insisted on keeping her, though he had indigestion in three days from want of a square meal. He said twelve dollars was enough to pay a maid.

"We had to pay Mary Ann twenty-five," Eleanor mentioned mildly, "and she was none too good."

"Well, we can't pay that," Arthur answered with so much sharpness in his voice that Eleanor dropped the subject.

Apparently it did not occur to him to leave money where she could get it to pay for groceries and vegetables and meats as need arose.

"I'll have to have some money," Eleanor mentioned on the fifth morning. She had been paying with a few dollars of her own left over from the expenses of her trousseau.

"Will this be enough?" Arthur asked, proffering a dollar bill.

"Why, no," she said with a blank gasp of surprise that pained.

She mentioned a few things that had to be purchased.

"Oh, I didn't know we were out of them," Arthur explained, and gave up another two dollar bill with an ill-suppressed sigh.

A fortnight of this sort of thing had not brought on a crisis. But Eleanor had come to perceive that one was coming sooner or later.

She could not live like this. Slowly but surely her wrath was rising toward the limit of endurance. She held off, half afraid to precipitate the discussion that would bring about an understanding.

It took her a third week to reach the point where she thought she didn't care if understanding meant parting from a man who had proven everything she had not believed him and none of the things she had expected.

And Arthur was learning every day just how much more impossible the situation was than his worst fears had conceived. Day after day he had walked himself half dead in the search for a job—a job that was enough better than the one he had to cover the discrepancy between a twenty-eight dollar income and a forty dollar outgo, or a job that would turn spare time into the essential extra twelve per.

Jobs there were a plenty. The European war had brought about recovery from first

fright and discovery of the opportunities afforded America, and America was making money hand over fist.

But jobs that paid more than twenty-eight dollars and jobs that paid twelve for mere spare time were a different matter. There were no jobs of that sort.

Except one. Arthur had not been home a day before he discovered that a dozen construction jobs in the city were working common labor in three shifts, with common labor scarcer and higher-priced than usual.

Any man who would—or could—after working at his own job for eight hours a day, work eight more with pick, shovel, or wheelbarrow, could earn an extra fifteen dollars a week from the start.

Only, Arthur knew perfectly well that he could not work eight hours with a pick and shovel if he were allowed to go home and sleep the other sixteen. Wherefore he gave the matter no consideration at first.

He proved to his entire satisfaction that he could not earn twenty cents an hour selling a wonderful patent darning machine he found advertised in a want column. He proved it by trying two whole days and enduring more rudeness than he had dreamed there was in the world.

Also he demonstrated that he could not earn twenty-five cents an hour selling a novelty toy on the sidewalk. He tried that in the next town where he was not known.

Likewise he learned just how much he could not make, if he were to spend a fourteen-hour day at addressing envelopes. He could not make a dollar and thirty cents. He made a dollar and a quarter and had to give an osteopath the dollar to save him from writer's cramp.

By no means were these all the things he had tried. It seemed to him he had attempted every forlorn hope a deceiving world offered a man who needed more money than he could earn.

He was sick of trying, sick of asking for jobs, sick of walking to save car fares, sick of foregoing lunches and finding dinners inedible, sick of playing the utter tightwad, sick of the whole impossible, intolerable game.

He was so sick of it all that he would have found nothing more grateful in the world than to weep out his misery with his head in his mother's lap.

But not in Eleanor's. He could not bring himself to tell her the truth. After all, the truth was not tempting. No man cares to

go to a woman he has just married and tell her:

"I can't make this game go, my dear. Let's quit it."

And Arthur had paraphrased the only other thing he could say into something like the following ludicrously awful speech:

"My darling, I love you. You've married me with the notion that you were going to live in a cozy little home of about the general sort you've been used to. You've spent your life's savings to help furnish that home. I'm sorry to disappoint you; but no doubt you'll be quite sufficiently comforted with the joy of having won an imbecile feeb who gambled on a two-thousand-dollar wedding present and won only spoons.

"Come, my dear, I've just engaged a snug little three-room flat, all light rooms when you turn the light on, shaft-airy, with bath when you take the partition from between the washtubs in a kitchen that's none too big for a bathroom anyhow.

"There are forty-five other families living in the house, each with six children, a player-piano and a dog or so. There's a saloon on one side of the entrance and a boiler factory next door.

"It's what I can afford, darling. Aren't we happily married, sweetheart?"

He could fancy himself saying either of these things to Eleanor—but not fancy enough so that he wouldn't say a lot of other, though less truthful, things first, and a lot of things he could only wish he hadn't said after he had said them.

On the morning that marked his return to work after the end of his honeyless honeymoon vacation, he went to the Morrison factory wondering whether he would find Eleanor upon his return, whether he deserved to find her.

He hardly knew how it had started. She had asked him to leave money for something, and he had asked what had become of the five dollars he had given her on Saturday morning.

He knew how it had ended—if the real end had been reached yet; and he would blush to his dying day to think he had rounded out his honeymoon with such words to his wife as he had spoken.

He was utterly penitent—and utterly hopeless. And in this frame of mind he walked past one of the big excavations being prepared for a vast munitions factory.

Suddenly the question of his ability to do the work was gone. He simply had to

do it. He paused long enough to speak to the burly superintendent who assured him that there were daily vacancies, especially in the night shifts.

He telephoned home to Eleanor that business would probably keep him quite late, that she had better not attempt to wait for his return. And such business! he thought.

Such business! The day at the factory had been as long and hard as is usually the first day after a vacation. He had hurried out and snatched a cheap dinner at the rear of a cheap café. It would have been filling if he had had the appetite to eat it.

The head-foreman of the first night-shift gave him a number-card for identification, and a pick and shovel, with the order to attach himself to a certain gang.

He had come in a new suit of overalls purchased at noon. His arrival excited no curiosity, no interest. A stout Italian was bossing the gang in three languages, and a million gestures.

It was a warm, humid night. No breeze came up with the setting of the sun to drive away the sticky heat of the day. Ten minutes of the pick had Arthur dripping with sweat and gasping for breath. He turned to see if his working mates were not resting.

The shrill voice of the foreman seemed to single him out with an oath that bade him, "Get on-a da job, you. What you think you do here?" And Arthur Bannock got on the job.

In less than half an hour all semblance of interest in his work, even that tiny interest requisite to strike the stony earth squarely with the pick's point, had disappeared. Every muscle in his body was aching. He had raised a blister in the hollow of his right hand, a blister big enough to torture until the pain of it was forgotten in other pains.

He worked on—that is he raised and dropped the pick. Then he was ordered to take a shovel and found himself trying to hurl the loosened earth and stones into a wagon.

"A-a-a-ah," snarled the foreman, as half the shovelful went back to the ground against the side of the cart, "you weak! Wak-a up, you! You dam-a loafer!"

There were other epithets no man had ever dared call Bannock before. He was already so nearly paralyzed with weariness that he could feel no resentment or interest in the thought of beating the insulter.

Bannock tried to pull himself together. His muscles were growing numb with weariness. He tried to forget where he was, what he was doing, to kill off the ache by sheer force of will not to ache.

He could not understand it. As a boy in high school he had gone in a bit for athletics. No ordinary task he set himself had tired him so quickly. He frequently played tennis half of an afternoon or more. In pinches he could take hold with others in the factory and make a man's showing.

Often he had watched laborers on such jobs as this. He had amused himself with comments on their frequent rests and pauses as tokens of inordinate laziness. Now he leaned on his pick the instant the foreman's back turned; he was unable to work half as steadily as the slowest of the squat little men about him.

And the numb ache grew into one more acute and less endurable. Every move seemed to be drawing something out of his backbone, his arms were two intense griefs, his legs were slow tortures and unsteady when he tried to move a step.

What was he trying to do to himself, he asked inwardly? And what was the use of trying to do it? It was as impossible as the whole situation he was trying to relieve by it.

Yet he kept on. The sharp oaths of the foreman seemed to have a hypnotic power over him, to make him move in spite of the folly of moving. And the ache crept upward to his head.

All the other aches seemed to lose themselves in the one. He realized dully that he was hardly lifting the pick at all, that his blows had no force save to add to the nauseating, agonizing pain in his head.

The foreman cursed him again, he tried to lift the pick higher, could not do it.

But something else took the foreman's attention. Arthur kept on—and on—another blow—and another—and another—

He could hardly see. The flaring torches seemed to give no light. Only the smoke of them reeked in his nostrils and added to his sickness.

And he raised the pick and dropped it, raised it and dropped it, raised it—

A rough hand was laid on his shoulder. He was pushed violently back. He raised his blood-shot, burning eyes with no feeling save one of stupid wonder.

Vaguely he heard the rasping scream of the foreman calling him unprintable names.

"Go get-a da time. Get-a-hell out o' here. You—"

And into the black horror of his pain came the dull consciousness that he was fired, that his last attempt to provide for his wife and for himself had been thwarted. He was too sick to resent it.

IV.

OUT OF THE BLUE.

SLOWLY he staggered up the incline from the pit. He barely knew that he was moving. He was too sick for speech or thought or feeling.

A man halted him at the shanty as he reached the sidewalk.

"Hey, you, where you going?" he demanded.

"I—I'm fired," Arthur said weakly. "I—I guess I'm—not up to this—kind of work."

"Well, here, take your pay. Better go over there and get yourself a drink."

The man consulted a card, got some coins from an iron box inside the tin shack, handed them to Arthur. They might have been pennies or silver dollars for all Arthur could have told about them.

But the advice seemed good. Arthur had not had a dozen drinks of liquor in his life, and those had been given him by way of medicine. He knew, though, that if ever a man needed alcohol he needed it now. He got into the cheap saloon and whispered thickly an order for whisky.

For the men who worked in that excavation the bartender had learned the wisdom of doing the pouring. He poured a liberal drink of dark whisky into a fairly liberal glass. Slowly it brought back a little strength, as Bannock leaned against the bar, too weak at first to move farther.

At length he went out and got to the corner to wait for a car. His brain had cleared sufficiently to enable him to realize the undesirability of riding in his overalls. He remembered then that he had left his coat and collar at the shack, and went back for them. The overalls he left where they dropped as he removed them.

He would never try that sort of job again. He could not try anything. Trying accomplished nothing.

This morning Eleanor had talked very plainly. She had reminded him that she had never insisted on living as they were trying to live; but had added that she could

not live at all without some money to buy food and pay servants and run things generally.

Well, he would see how she was willing to live. He had reached the end of his rope. The house would have to go—the piano, the other unpaid-for pieces of furniture. They could not keep even the make-shift maid they had.

Would Eleanor endure the cheaper life? He had not strength to care. He could not even tell whether he would endure it himself.

He had made a complete muddle of everything. He had wrecked his life and hers. He had committed the blunder for which he would never be able to ask forgiveness or to forgive himself.

But the relief from the headache was brief. Then it returned with what seemed greater fury than ever. It assumed the terrific hurt of a blow the impact of which was somehow a continuous thing instead of a momentary crash.

It staggered him, dizzied, blinded. Thrice in the block from the cars to his new home he caught at fences or posts and waited for his head to clear enough to go on. He could not manipulate the key in the lock. Eleanor came and opened the door while he was leaning against it.

He sprawled forward into the hall and lay prone.

In a panic of terror his wife bent over his prostrate form.

"Arthur! Arthur!" she moaned. "What has happened? Arthur!" With a tremendous effort she rolled him from his face so that he lay upon his side. She bent over him again. "Arthur!"

Then she caught the odor of the cheap whisky he had drunk.

Stunned with a new horror, she reeled back as if struck. At the same instant the momentary daze lifted sufficiently from her husband's brain so that he struggled to rise—got to a sitting posture on the hall settee—stared into her face from bloodshot eyes set in features ghastly white.

"I—I'm sick," he whispered.

And she saw that he was. Whatever had caused the sickness, she could but overcome her loathing enough to give him the assistance he needed. He had to be helped up the stairs, helped in removing his mud-caked shoes and sweat-soaked clothes.

Sick! Just once in her life had she seen sickness which seemed to resemble his,

when she had gone to a wretched tenement to inquire for a delinquent pupil.

That pupil's father, sprawled in the middle of the bare floor, blind, stupefied, comatose, dead drunk, had remained in her memory as the picture of the last depths of degradation to which a human being could descend.

At first the thought of the disgrace of such sickness kept her from any thought of summoning aid. She hurried to do what things seemed most likely to help.

Arthur complained of his head in his half dumb fashion. She found that the bottle of headache powder recommended its contents for results of alcoholic indulgence. She gave him a heavy dose.

And as she rushed to and fro, she knew that this was to be the end. This morning she had been angry and had hinted at the impossibility of keeping on with their life together. She had not meant that at the time. But now she knew that she must mean it.

The last of her dream of happiness had been shattered. Her respect for him was gone. The disgrace of separation, the bitterness of acknowledging her disappointment would be better than any attempt to continue life with such a man, to bring him children into the world, to end both their lives and others for which they would be responsible in the squalid slums for which he was plainly headed.

She would see him through this wretched illness. And then—

But it soon became apparent that the illness was beyond her management. She called for her own family's doctor. She decided to get her mother to come in the morning, since it was all too clear that she would get little sleep through the remainder of the night.

She asked no questions of the doctor, and was grateful that he did not give her the humiliation of telling her what she knew was the matter. She obeyed his directions. Together they got Arthur into something like natural sleep, though morphine had helped to produce it.

Eleanor did not go to sleep, did not even go to bed. She sat up and mourned for her lost love.

Arthur was unable to get up in the morning, but his mind was actively worried over his inability to go to business.

"Old Morrison's to be back," he mourned. "Everything is at sixes and

sevens. It will be just like my luck to lose what job I've got now."

His fussing did not appeal to her. Better, he failed to arouse her sympathies now.

"What did you expect?" she asked coldly.

"Er—what?" he asked in puzzled turn.

"You didn't suppose you could go to work to-day after getting yourself into—that condition last night, did you?" she explained.

Arthur stared at her uncomprehending. Slowly it was borne upon his mind that she really meant by "condition" exactly what her tone in pronouncing the word had seemed to indicate. She had thought he was drunk!

He was shocked into silence by the hurt of it. He stared more, choking back his heart in his throat. She—Eleanor—could think that of him!

He suddenly turned his face to the wall. Surely the world was using him very ill for all his effort to face his problems like a man.

Outside the postman's whistle blew. That whistle could mean nothing more to him. He wondered if there were anything in life that could give it a flavor of joy for any one. Naught could restore any happiness to him. Eleanor thought he was drunk.

She went down-stairs a moment later. She had not told her mother the truth; had hidden behind the statement that the doctor did not say what ailed Arthur. She could not bring herself to utter the truth yet.

"I put the mail on the mantel in the library," Mrs. Jangreaves told her daughter. And when Eleanor had finished telephoning Mr. Morrison of Bannock's temporary illness, she carried it up-stairs.

"Want to see the mail?" she asked with the frigid indifference she was schooling herself to use on her husband.

He took it dumbly, glanced wo-begonely at the envelope he knew contained a warning of the date of his next premium payment for life insurance, fingered indifferently the neat, square, unmarked package that had come with it.

He tore the latter open, less for any interest in it than to cover the awkwardness of a silence he felt he had no heart to break.

Suddenly he sat up straight from his pillows, his eyes staring at the top of the bundle he had opened. His fingers shook so violently that the whole bundle dropped to the bed.

A gasp of utter, unbelieving amazement caused Eleanor to look around at him.

And he was sitting on a bed, the top of which was almost literally covered with hundred dollar bills.

V.

REAL RICHES.

IF a human being were a logical creature Arthur would have done about everything but what he did and would have left undone about everything he actually accomplished.

Those beautiful yellow bills hadn't a thing in the world to do with the fact that Eleanor had accused him of being drunk. Yet he was standing and holding her in a bear hug in less than five minutes. Sick in bed? Yes, before he saw that money.

And somehow, between laughs and tears and getting up and getting back to bed and getting up again, he managed now to tell her the whole truth about the expected wedding gift, the awful discrepancy between expense and income and the real reason for all his absences and his last night's illness.

"And you though I was drunk!"

He laughed at her. It was a joke now. Everything was a joke. The foolishness of depending on a possible wedding present seemed not half so foolish now that the wedding present had come.

For it must be the wedding present. What else could it be? Who but Mr. Morrison could have thought of sending them so much money or have been able to send it if he did think of it?

Odd that he should send it in currency; odd that they could find no word of explanation in the package; odd that even the addressing was done in typewriting as if to conceal the giver's identity, and that the package had not even been registered, as if the sender preferred to trust the innocence of the thing's appearance rather than Uncle Sam's protection.

"But," Eleanor remarked, "what's the use of worrying about where it comes from when we've got it?"

Then they counted the money and it seemed odder than ever. There were fifty of those hundred-dollar bills.

Arthur held up his jubilation five whole minutes to look puzzled over that. The fact that he was paid better than King was

an indication that he stood a little higher in the esteem of the firm—which was old Morrison himself, of course.

But he was not paid more than twice as much as King. And King had got two thousand.

"But, after all," he decided, "the factory manager is a lot more important to the firm than the buyer. He comes pretty near to being an integral part of it.

"And say," he exclaimed again a moment later, "do you know why, I think, he sent the money this way? They say the old lady is the close one. I'll bet she gave him the very deuce for what he sent King, and he's fixing it so that she can't go over his canceled checks and learn what he's doing for me."

If these things did not fully explain they explained as nearly as anything else could. And—once more—why worry about explanations.

They decided not to publish their good fortune broadcast. Eleanor thought that would be only delicate respect for the obvious wishes of the donor. Arthur felt that he didn't want the whole world to know his coming prosperity was entirely a matter of a gift from the clouds.

Having decided this, and that she felt so much refreshed over the money and the sudden clearing of suspicions and restoration of happiness as to have no further need to detain her mother, Eleanor went down and told Mrs. Jangreaves all about it.

Whereupon Mrs. Jangreaves decided to go down town before returning home. And she dropped into the office of Morgrove & Co., brokers, and told her brother, who was assistant manager there.

No, it did not go any further. A broker is about the closest-mouthed thing on two legs when it comes to telling of others' financial affairs. But Eleanor's Uncle Charlie gave a cry of delight:

"For the Lord's sake, tell him to hustle down here. I can put him next to the biggest chance he'll ever have. Tell him I know where the doctor's going to take the fattest war baby of them all."

"What's that?" Mrs. Jangreaves asked.

"He'll know what it is," her brother said. And she telephoned the message.

But Arthur's mind had already started on the question of investing that five thousand. At least half of it was going straight into the house, to put the question of rental and payments to rest perpetual.

The other twenty-five hundred might be invested in something solid and dividend-paying, which would a little more than carry the interest of a two thousand mortgage on the house.

"The best man to tell us about that will be Bob Whitlock," he said to Eleanor. "Bob will know what to do right off the bat. I'll get him up here this evening."

And he started down for the telephone. No one would have noticed that his gait was at all weak after the illness of the previous night. He came back much more slowly.

"Why, that's queer," he said in a puzzled, hurt tone.

"What?" Eleanor asked, putting a final pat to the pillows she had been adjusting while he telephoned.

"Why—Bob. I told the man that answered who I was, and he came back and said Mr. Whitlock did not know me. I sent him back twice. The third time Bob himself got onto the wire. And—

"He asked me: 'Who is this?'

"And I told him twice over—said I was Arthur at first, and then even spelled my whole name for him. And he didn't seem to know me. At first he was fairly good-natured about it; only he said:

"'Well, my friend, you've got a long advantage over me. If you've got a square proposition in my line you don't need to pretend to be my long lost brother to get me to listen to it. If you haven't—I'm busy.'

"What do you think of that?"

"He couldn't have understood you," Eleanor suggested.

"He spelled my name after me," Arthur insisted.

"It couldn't have been Bob," she rejoined.

"He said he was. It was his voice."

"You'd better wait and go to see him this afternoon," she counseled.

"I don't know whether I will or not. I tried again to make him understand who I was and he got angrier. 'I heard you say that before,' he snapped. And then he told me to go to the devil."

But Arthur went to see Whitlock two days later. It was his first thought, after recovering from the shock of reading of his friend's arrest. To see him Bannock went to the county jail, where Arthur was waiting sentence for his confessed crime.

And the guard to whom Arthur gave his

card came back and announced: "He says he's got nothing to say."

"Nothing to say," Arthur repeated vaguely, uncomprehendingly.

"He's sore," the guard explained. "He says he's seen enough blamed reporters already."

And Arthur comprehended that his erstwhile friend wanted no sympathy, no pity, no commiseration. Probably it was out of consideration for the Bannocks' pride that the defaulting cashier had disclaimed acquaintance when he knew the crash was imminent.

Arthur wrote to Bob that night and said that there need be no such feeling. He and Eleanor were not the kind of people who disowned their closest friends at sight of trouble. He would be glad to give any assistance he could.

He never received a reply. Then he tried to forget Bob Whitlock, to cover the memory of the unfortunate young man with the oblivion he seemed to wish. But we must get back to the day of the gift.

Arthur Bannock found himself improved to an excellent appetite for lunch. He felt so well that he decided to attend to Eleanor's Uncle Charlie that very afternoon.

Uncle Charlie swiftly overcame Arthur's objections to a speculative venture. Heat-proof Steel, after being kicked about all the brokers' offices in the land, was about to leap to its feet on the strength of an enormous war order. It could be bought at eighty. It was sure to soar to twice par.

Arthur yielded to the extent of three thousand dollars' worth of the heavy margins brokers are requiring in these days of reformed Wall Street. He yielded just a little farther.

Uncle Charlie advised him not to put the other two thousand into the house for a few days. Having it in reserve would be perfect insurance against any possible preliminary slump that might be started by men who wanted to get the whole of the stock before the rise.

Having settled this by three o'clock, Arthur decided he still had strength enough to go down to the factory and thank his benefactor.

Mr. Morrison greeted him cordially.

"I haven't had the chance to congratulate you," he said, holding out his hand.

"Well," Arthur retorted, "you've done a lot to make the congratulations worth while. I'm sorry I couldn't have got on the job

this morning; but I'm feeling better since the mail came."

"Got some good news, eh?" the old man said pleasantly. He had had a good time, he counted Bannock a faithful, steady employee who would be the steadier for being married.

"Well, rather," Arthur answered warmly, and with the sort of grin that presupposes understanding on the other's part. "It was the prettiest looking news I ever remember seeing, all right."

"You sound as if you'd got a small fortune," Morrison remarked.

"I don't call that a *small* fortune," Arthur contested. "It's rather more than I expected to own in twenty years. I wish I'd got married sooner. I should have, if I'd known what it would bring me."

"Well, it's never too late to mend," old Morrison quoted with a triteness more in line with his usual conversational efforts.

"I thought I'd get around and thank you anyhow," Arthur said. "I hardly know any words to use in thanking a man for a present like that."

"You liked it, eh?" Morrison rejoined.

"Oh, yes, I liked it. I guess any young man would have liked a present of that sort."

"I'm glad."

"I'm afraid I haven't quite deserved it, though," Arthur confessed.

"That was for me to decide, wasn't it?" the old man retorted.

"But I'm going to do my darnedest to live up to it after this," Bannock promised. "You can count on me for that."

"That's the way to talk," his employer rejoined. "If I hadn't thought you'd appreciate it, I wouldn't have sent it."

Morrison turned half around, as if eager to get at some of the business his holiday had accumulated.

"By the way," Arthur offered, "I don't know but I'd like to invest part of it—say two thousand dollars—right here in the business."

Just for an instant a puzzled frown appeared on the boss's forehead. To Arthur it was immediately accounted for by the words which followed.

"You want to put two thousand into the business, eh? U-m-m-m, I don't see how I could let you do that. You know I own all the stock there is in this house. And I'd rather give a man money any day than part with any of this stock."

Which, Arthur reflected, seemed to have been exactly the preference on which Morrison had acted.

"But, Mr. Morrison," he suggested further, "I've thought of several little ways in which the factory output could be vastly increased. Perhaps you could raise your capital enough to let in my little investment."

"How could it be increased?" Morrison demanded suspiciously.

Morrison believed that a gasoline engine or an engine factory should be let alone so long as it is running well.

"That Number Two boring machine could be eliminated entirely, with the man that runs it, or it could double its present capacity by—"

But the technical details he went into would not interest the reader. They interested Morrison.

"Let's see about that," he said, getting from his chair and leading the way from the office into the factory proper.

His manner showed a little of the fear of being convinced, but at the same time an unwillingness to let a real opportunity pass.

But the fear had dropped from him fifteen minutes later, as Arthur led him to other machines to point out improvements he had never before felt the interest to hint at, since Morrison had appeared rather more likely to resent suggestions than to act upon them. Only the big gift of this morning had convinced Arthur that his boss respected him enough to listen to him.

"Say, Bannock," Morrison was urging eagerly, "how soon could you get the stuff and rig those improvements?"

"We could make all we need to finish the improvements with our own plant," Arthur assured him. "And it would cost about five thousand dollars."

"But how soon?" Morrison repeated impatiently.

"Two weeks—three at the longest."

"For the Lord's sake get at them. Why—why—young man, you've certainly squared for your little present already. I don't mind telling you that I had made up my mind to turn down a two hundred thousand dollar foreign order to-morrow because we hadn't equipment and couldn't get equipment in time to take it."

If Eleanor still retained any misgivings about Arthur's liberality they must have vanished that evening.

He took her to the best restaurant in

town for a dinner that made the waiter's eyes bulge. And he had box seats for the best show. They went in a taxicab.

"So Morrison's admitted that he gave you the money?" Eleanor asked him.

"Oh, he didn't say it in so many words, but he virtually admitted it. And, better than that, he told me I'd already squared for it. He's tickled to death with the improvements I suggested. I'm afraid they're going to keep me away from home a bit for the next three weeks. I hope you'll understand now, though."

"I understand," she answered, pressing his hand under the tablecover. "And it's going to be my real honeymoon, too, whether you're here half the time or not."

VI.

THE WAR BABIES.

ELEANOR was quite right. It was the beginning of their honeymoon. Understanding makes a wonderful difference in honeymoons. Arthur understood how he was going to make a living now.

His wife, his home had ceased to be millstones around his neck. And Eleanor understood that he was succeeding, showing himself a better man than she had thought him capable of being.

He was very busy. The improvements required some designing and much changing after they had been designed and completed. A lot of things look better on paper than they do in cold steel.

Yet Arthur made the machines come right at last. And then there was the big order Morrison had taken, and a night force as well as a day force.

And Arthur was more a factory manager than ever before, for he had a head-foreman under him at night. He had to be around enough to keep track of both gangs of mechanics.

Undoubtedly that was just as well. Had he not been so busy he might not have endured so calmly that which took place with the three thousand dollars he had invested with Uncle Charlie for the time being.

Heatproof Steel reached two hundred and ten. Eleanor's uncle sold Arthur's shares then, and telephoned the happy pair that their three thousand had grown to thirty.

A man must needs be busy to keep his head when such a growth takes place in

four weeks. And when Uncle Charlie got the thirty thousand aboard the bandwagon of Turylol, the new explosive, just before it was accepted by the French government, Arthur found it getting very hard to keep his steps from wandering out at the front door of the factory and down to the broker's office.

Then, just to give spice to the fun, an accident or somebody blew up the Turylol factory and sent the stock down with the same fell bomb. In a single night Arthur's fortunes had dwindled from eighty-five to thirty-five thousand dollars.

It was the next morning that he went to his wife's uncle and got back three thousand to add to the other two he still kept in the bank.

"You may play with the rest," he told Uncle Charlie. "I've other use for five thousand dollars."

And Uncle Charlie laughed at him three days later for having to take a profit of thirty thousand that might have been thirty-five. Last summer's bull market was a wonder. Almost every one who ever saw a real bull market before says there never was one like it.

But the taking of that three thousand was more dangerous than losing it might have been. It made the paper fortunes Uncle Charlie was conjuring seem real.

Arthur had got real money out of it, money that he could put into the bank. He could have got thirty thousand dollars more. And the next day he could have got forty—and the third day fifty.

Fifty thousand of real money, sixty thousand that would buy things, pay for a dozen such houses as he lived in, get him more automobiles than he could use, purchase clothes for him from the most select tailors in the land and for Eleanor from Paris, regardless of the scarcity of imports—real money that made him really rich!

Yes, he could live in the town's best section; he could have servants as many as he would and more than he could endure around; he could eat of the fat of the land and sleep it off in the boxes of the New York Metropolitan Opera-House if he chose.

And who could tell how rich he would be to-morrow? Last week he had been worth eighty-five thousand. Next week he might own a quarter of a million.

He gave most of his attention to the night shift at the factory. He tried to be-

lieve it needed him more than the day men. But he did not sleep through the day. He hung about the office where Uncle Charlie presided and helped men juggle dollars into their pockets from the thin air.

In spite of his absence Eleanor was happy. The clouds had lifted for them both. Whether they really came out millionaires or not, the future was safe.

They could keep what they had, their house, their furniture, the better maid they had got. The climax of happiness came one evening when Eleanor whispered that she was just beginning to hope that there was going to be an heir for anything Arthur might accumulate.

And Uncle Charlie telephoned within an hour that it might be well for Arthur to hang around the office as much as possible to-morrow. It was a little doubtful how Armor Plate was going to break. There might be a tumble so sudden that they could not get out of it in time. Or, it might rise another fifteen or twenty points and—

A little figuring showed Arthur that he would top a hundred thousand if it did. He suddenly wanted the hundred thousand. An hour ago he had felt secure with his five thousand in the bank. Then he had not heard Eleanor's rumor of a possible heir.

The five thousand would not provide for a son's education or set the son up in business. Still less would it take care of a daughter.

He wanted his children to have a nursery governess, to be driven about in motor cars, to travel, to do all the things he had never dreamed of doing himself. His present home might do very well for Eleanor and himself. But his children needed a palace for their rearing.

So Arthur left the factory soon after nine o'clock in the morning. Heaven knew he was giving the factory his wages' worth of attention. Morrison was not complaining, was only complimenting, was evidently quite satisfied that he was getting his money's worth even with the five-thousand-dollar present thrown in.

For the first time it seemed to Arthur that he was really anxious about this stock game. It had grown upon him quite slowly. But it had got him at last. He felt his heart skip a beat when the first quotation of Armor Plate showed a fractional rise from the last night's price.

His heart might have saved itself for

further skipping. Arthur felt as if he were being shot down the longest incline of some dizzy roller coaster and then dropped on into space.

Armor Plate simply fell. There wasn't even time to count it a toboggan slide. It was a straight plunge.

A straight plunge down from ninety to fifty. Practically it had meant one thousand a point to Arthur Bannock. When the rally came he found himself almost as wet with perspiration as on the night when, not six weeks before, he had tried to earn two dollars and a half by working with pick and shovel.

His head ached almost as badly. His heart felt as if it had been strained out of position and was being sprung back into its socket.

But the rally was but a breathing spell and a lull to save aching heads and strained hearts; was only enough of a rise to keep foolish men like Arthur and even his wiser uncle from getting out while they might save something from the wreck.

Arthur had left the brokerage office's telephone number with the head foreman at the factory. Just as Armor Plate started its second mad drop Bannock was called to the 'phone.

He had to go. The whole factory would be held up unless he arrived within fifteen minutes. He gave one anxious glance at the board. It had not changed the quotation on Armor Plate. But—

"Arthur, before you go out," Uncle Charlie called to him, "I just want to suggest that you leave your check here for five thousand. You have that. It will be enough to save your stock if it should go down to thirty. Even this mad market can't drive it to twenty. And it will bob up serenely as soon as the excitement dies out. It's always good for forty-five."

The wisdom of this was too apparent. Arthur left the check. Then he hurried to the factory and the hour's work he must direct there.

And his last five thousand was in the pot. Moment by moment he thought afresh of what that five thousand meant to him, of what the loss of it would mean.

He had not paid the twenty-five hundred on the house, because he had begun to doubt whether he would be satisfied with the house if he owned it. But to lose it—without having any other!

And to go back to the awful worry, the

bootless search for jobs, the pain of parting with each miserly coin, the certainty that ruin stared him in the face, the loss of his own happiness, Eleanor's utter anxiety! Why had he put that five thousand in?

He could lose the rest. He had never had it, save as an account on the books of the brokerage concern. But the five thousand—it spelled the difference between happiness and misery, between enough and want.

That five thousand had found them a man and wife estranged, almost ready for the divorce courts; in five minutes it had brushed away the dark clouds, transformed a tempest into calm, straightened out the course of their lives. And he had put it to the touch of chance.

He could not stand the suspense. He rushed away from the work he was doing and got his wife's uncle on the telephone.

"Where's Armor Plate, now?" he asked.

"Thirty-three. I'm just going to put in that check now to cover your margins," answered Uncle Charlie.

"Don't!" Arthur cried, almost in a passion.

"What? Why not?" demanded the older and more experienced stock gambler.

"I can't let it go. I have to have it. I daren't lose it. Don't put it in."

"But you won't lose it," reiterated the broker's manager. "And it will save the rest."

"Let the rest go. I—"

"Oh, you're scared. It's—"

"Don't put it in," Arthur insisted fiercely.

"Nonsense," Uncle Charlie snapped back.

"I'm not going to let you make a panicky fool of yourself. I—"

"It's my money. I don't want it put in. I don't care what becomes of the rest. I insist that—"

There was a click and the receiver in his hand was silent.

"Uncle Charlie! Uncle Charlie!" Arthur shouted, as if that could bring the man back.

Then he began to pound on the hook of the telephone. It was several minutes before he got the operator, and then still longer before the operator could get a response from the brokerage office.

It was the young clerk who answered.

"He's not here; he's busy in the other room. Be back in a moment," the clerk reported.

"Call him—call him," cried Arthur.

"I can't this moment. But—"

"Where's Armor Plate now?" Arthur asked despairingly.

"Twenty-nine and a half. Any order?"

"Good-by!"

It was gone. It took Arthur several moments to realize that the money was not necessarily lost because it was being risked.

He gave the needed directions for the rest of the work—gave them mechanically, gave them with lips that trembled. He could not save the five thousand or lose it now by any act of his. He had put it in the uncertain hand of the goddess Chance.

The suspense of waiting to know what the goddess was doing with it became intolerable. He rushed out the words of his last directions to the men.

He got to the telephone. The agony of waiting for the connection was that much too much. He gave up and started at a run for the cars.

A block of a minute behind a coal-wagon seemed to him an hour. He could see nothing but the elimination of that last, essential five thousand. He thought his brain would crack if it were really gone.

He could hardly walk up the stairs of the building. The one thing harder would have been to wait for the elevator. Panting, more from sheer torture of anxiety than from effort, he dashed at last into the door.

"Did you put in my check?" he whispered fiercely, as he reached his uncle's desk.

He had not even glanced at the board to see what might have become of the stock.

"No, confound you! And you've been wiped out. And look—old Armor Plate's going right back up where she belongs. See it! See it! You're losing a thousand a minute that you might have saved. There's your cursed check. You gave me your orders. Now don't cry about it."

Uncle Charlie had been interested enough in helping Arthur to be angry at failing to do so.

"Cry about it!" echoed Arthur, his voice growing wabbly with the relief from his suspense, as he snatched the check and tore it to pieces.

"But look what you're losing," growled the older man.

"I can loose that," Arthur almost sang. "I could use it of course. I don't mind having a lot of money. But I can get on without a lot, so long as my little five thou-

sand is safe in the bank. I have to have that."

"Oh, I don't know as the bank's so awfully safe. Notice the run they're having up at the People's Banking and Trust Company? It's just broke that young Whitlock got away with about a hundred thousand dollars—and the people are scared. They managed to keep it out of the papers at first. Now there's the devil to pay."

Arthur sighed. Bob Whitlock was a sore subject with him. But he could not sigh very deeply. His own five thousand dollars reposed safely in the hands of the solid First National.

"You'd better let me put you into Armor Plate on this rise and get back a little bit," Uncle Charlie suggested.

"Never," Arthur burst forth solemnly. "Never again. Not with this money. I wouldn't risk one chance in a hundred against it. I have to have this!"

He went out and boarded a car.

Still he could not calm himself. He could only think of that five thousand being safe, of the awful consequences that would have followed its loss, of the salvation and hope that were bound up in keeping it.

To-morrow he would pay in full for the house; he would not even buy a mortgage with any part of the money. Those who wanted quick riches could have them. Five thousand and safety were sufficient for him.

A newsboy shouted at a transfer corner, and leaped along the running-board of the open car. Arthur bought a paper. Perhaps reading about the excitement up at the People's Trust Company would get his mind clear.

A moment later his extreme overjoy had been shocked out of any dangerous degree of excitement. For the newspaper, whose owner was a man of large affairs and anxious to save the little trust company, had headed the column article dealing with it:

PROSPECT OF FINDING STOLEN FUNDS OF TRUST CO.

Hope of Recovering Most, if not All, of Defaulting Cashier's Stealings.

Simultaneous with the run which is disturbing the otherwise sound condition of the People's Banking and Trust Co. has come the prospect of recovering most of the money stolen by assistant-cashier Robert Whitlock, now serving a five-year sentence for his thefts. It has just come to light

that, last week, a former friend of Whitlock's, who does not wish his name disclosed, appeared before the bank officials and announced that he had been made the involuntary custodian of ten thousand dollars of the cashier's stealing.

Whitlock's method of providing for a comfortable return to life at the end of his sentence was unique. The ten thousand dollars in hundred-dollar bills was enclosed in a package and addressed to the defaulter's friend, without any mark of identification that might help the police in case of accidental discovery of the package's contents.

Under separate cover a note told plainly enough the identity of the sender. In this Whitlock protested that he was sacrificing himself to save the really guilty party. He explained that the ten thousand dollars was not his money anyhow, but a trust fund held for an orphan niece. Wherefore he urged his friend to keep the money against his discharge from prison, explaining his manner of sending it by mentioning that a check would be apt to arouse suspicion.

Of course there is no record in the People's Trust Company's books, or those of any other known bank, of any such fund having been on deposit there. The whole scheme was a ruse, indicative of his distrust of any person to whom he might confide the truth about the money.

Since it has now been pretty thoroughly established that the bulk of Whitlock's stealings consisted of a direct removal of some ninety thousand dollars, mostly in hundred-dollar bills, taken within a few weeks of the embezzler's arrest, it is hoped that more such hidden sums will come to light shortly. The police believe they have already located most of his friends, and are quizzing them closely to-day, with results not as yet ready for publication.

Of course the People's Banking and Trust Company was able to stand the loss of the hundred thousand dollars, and it is hoped that it will be able to survive the foolish panic that has sent its depositors into a wild run for their money. But—

Arthur Bannock could read no more. He had saved his five thousand dollars, that absolute essential to happiness in home and family and life. He had received no such note as this other friend had got. If any police were quizzing him or Eleanor, he was not aware of it.

But—yes, it certainly accounted for Bob's pretense of not knowing him. Bob had not wanted the police to quiz him. It accounted for everything.

Morrison had sent no present but the spoons. The old skinflint had availed himself of Arthur's enthusiasm over the gift, and got the benefit of all the extra labor Arthur had done of late.

But the five thousand—was stolen money!

At the next transfer corner Bannock left the car. He telephoned to Mr. Morrison that he was feeling ill. He had done enough for the boss without extra pay or sign that any would be forthcoming. He went home.

Wearily, brokenly, he walked up the steps of the house five thousand dollars would save for him. Eleanor opened the door before he could insert his key.

"Eleanor, look at this," he cried.

As if in echo of his words, his wife, holding a sheet of note-paper in his hands, was saying in a voice weak with the same misery that was shaking his own:

"Arthur, look at this! I found it to-day. It had slipped down from where mother had put it on the mantel clock. The date is the same as—"

The last vestige of doubt was gone.

VII.

LOVE, HAPPINESS—OR HONOR.

THE two sat in silence until dinner-time. Occasionally Arthur got up and paced the floor, until his weariness came back and he sat down to think.

He would give the world to get Eleanor to commit herself as to what course he should take. But had he a right to put the question up to her?

Once he broke the silence with a non-committal query: "Has any one been around inquiring about it from you?"

"No," she answered simply.

"They might have been inquiring of our relatives," he suggested.

"Mother was talking to me on the 'phone half an hour before you came in. She said nothing about it."

"And I've just left Uncle Charlie. It looks as if the police were missing us. I guess most of them got ten thousand bunches. Ours being only five, is going to be overlooked."

"It looks so," Eleanor answered.

She did not even meet his eyes. And they continued to sit in silence.

They toyed with the food the competent maid served them. Neither had a semblance of appetite. A dozen times Arthur choked back the great question—

"What shall I do about it?" Then, quite suddenly, as if she had been choking back the same question too, she uttered it:

"What are you going to do about it, Arthur?"

He was tremulously glad that she had brought it up.

"I don't know," he confessed miserably. "What do you think about it?"

"I'm afraid I don't know," she confessed in turn.

"If I'd only risked it this afternoon!" Arthur groaned with sudden remembrance. "I could have taken it back and still had five or ten thousand to keep."

"Would it be right to keep the rest you've made?" she asked, brightening.

"Certainly. That would be mine. Only, there isn't any rest. I wouldn't take the chance on losing the last five thousand for an extra margin when Uncle Charlie urged me to. And the rest was wiped out in the Armor Plate slide."

"Only the five thousand is left, then?"

"Only the five thousand is left," he repeated miserably.

"And if you take that back to the bank—" She seemed to be musing aloud, then broke off.

"You know what it was before we got it," he supplemented.

"No, it wouldn't be quite that. We'd just go and live somewhere else and on what you earn," she corrected him.

"Live in a cheap flat—live without a servant—live on cheap food—let the piano go, the five hundred we have in the house. Do you think you could stand it?"

She sighed.

"I could have stood it then. But now, if there's to be a baby. Oh, I don't know."

Her words were a moan. Her eyes ran from one object to another in the comfortably furnished room, the symbols of the kind of living to which she had always been accustomed. She sighed again.

"Do you want me to take it back?" he asked in final desperation.

"I don't know," she repeated in the same tone.

"Well, do you want me to keep it," he went on.

"Oh, I oughtn't to," she groaned; "but—but—I don't know."

It was not fair to ask her to settle it for him. He was the man of the house, the provider.

"I suppose," she finally told him, "I can endure it if you can. But—I don't know," she added hastily.

"I don't either," he acknowledged.

They fell silent again. Far, far into the night they lay awake. The hall clock

chimed one, chimed two, chimed three. Still each lay and fought for an answer. Then suddenly both spoke at once:

"Say, Arthur!"

"Say, Eleanor!"

"What is it?" they both then asked in deference to the other.

"I've thought of a scheme. Uncle Charlie—"

"Could help us make one more turn. Surely we've the right to that chance."

"That's what I was thinking. He's been right in the long run every time so far. I don't believe it's much of a chance. Uncle Charlie makes it almost a sure thing."

"We couldn't really do without the money."

"No—not now. We couldn't."

And both fell asleep.

"I wish it was some other day than Saturday," Arthur remarked in the morning. "Not much can happen in one short day. I want this over with."

"Well, we can go to church to-morrow and pray about it," Eleanor suggested.

"Can we?" Arthur asked. Men are better compromisers than women; but they find a compromise harder to pray over.

He telephoned to Mr. Morrison that he would get in for the extra work in the afternoon. Morrison said the morning's absence would be all right; but that he really needed to get off himself for the afternoon, and would be glad that Arthur would be back.

And Arthur went to Uncle Charlie's brokerage office.

"What's the chance of doubling a piking five thousand this morning?" he asked eagerly.

"Well, Armor Plate was still rising last night. It's got to get up to forty-five before it will stop. It really belongs there. What's got you into the notion of risking your precious five thousand?"

"I want more," Arthur explained lucidly.

"Ah-h-h. Well, I'm still playing the Plate. Want to get on?"

And Arthur got on. Then, for the first time in his life, he sat down with the purpose of staying until the office followed the New York Stock Exchange in closing, or until his deal had been accomplished.

His five thousand was in the hands of chance again. The five thousand that he had to have, that he wanted to return, that he could return only when it had made him another five thousand which was his own.

Well, this was the only way to do with it. But he started a prayer, as Eleanor had suggested; then cut it off abruptly. He couldn't pray about gambling with other people's money.

But Armor Plate jumped four points within half an hour. Uncle Charlie had got his nephew-in-law a narrower margin than most brokers would even consider in these days. The four points meant a thousand of the five won for Arthur.

Four points more—six—seven—eight—

It was coming. Arthur began to wonder if Providence might not be making some allowances and listening to Eleanor's prayers after all.

Then a drop. Arthur held his breath. Five hundred gone. A fractional rise again—a whole point up once more.

He was praying in spite of himself. Surely Heaven could not let him lose.

A wonderful market! Seldom indeed have there been such phenomenal jumps and tumbles as these war brides and war babies have provided for the mirthful gamblers who, in spite of past warnings, in spite of past lessons, come back for more—and are born every minute.

Jumps of two points and three—even of ten with a single sale; and yet heavier drops! No wonder brokers want big margins.

And suddenly Armor Plate began to slide back. Back—back—

From forty and a half to thirty-five and three-quarters at a single bound. Why—

It had bitten into his five thousand—the five thousand he did not own. And another point down—and another—and—

Good God! He was losing it! And it was not his.

Suddenly he knew he had a conscience. Yesterday he had feared to risk home, comfort, connubial happiness. The certainty of these had been more precious than any merely probable millions. But what was he playing in the pot to-day?

Those same things—and one thing more—

His honor!

Most consciences waken easily when they discover that the profits of evil are in flight. Now that it seemed he would neither return the money nor have it, he could face the quality of what he was doing.

Gambling with the money of others! Losing it!

The police would probably never discover that he had had any of Bob Whitlock's stealings. Eleanor would never be able to accuse him of his looseness with honor. He doubted if he would dare face her, were he to take the remnant of the money before its chance for winning was gone.

But he could never face himself if he didn't take it.

And up at the bank men were surging and fuming and pressing forward for that and other money like it—money that was theirs, not his.

It was hard to conceive how so little as five thousand—so little as the half of it that was left—could save a bank. But it could save him, the biggest thing he could keep or lose, bigger than reputation or happiness or comfort or home or love—his honor.

He got up. As he approached the desk, a new quotation was being put beneath the name of the fluttering stock. He did not look at it. More or less, he would take what was left to the place where it belonged.

"Mr. Bannock!"

Arthur stopped, startled at the sound of his name. It was the boy who had just answered the ring of the telephone in the booth at one side of the room.

"Mrs. Bannock wants to speak to you."

He looked at the board. The last record had but announced the sale of more stock at the previous price. He went into the booth. Perhaps he ought to let Eleanor have a say.

"Is that you, Arthur?"

"Yes, Eleanor."

"Have you made anything yet?"

"Not yet—in fact—"

"Arthur, I want you not to try. I'd rather—"

"Thank God!" he whispered thickly. "Good-by, darling!"

"But it's going up again," Uncle Charlie objected. "See, it's on the jump. I tell you it's got to go to forty-five. You're too erratic, too fearful to be allowed loose in a game like this. Why—"

"How much does it amount to now?"

"You'll get back forty-nine hundred and fifty dollars," Uncle Charlie told him after a moment's figuring.

"Thank God!" Arthur breathed again. "I've fifty more in the bank yet. Can I get it in cash?"

"You're a fool," Uncle Charlie growled.

And Arthur smiled. It was not much of a smile. A glance at the clock took what there was of it away.

It was half past eleven. It would take fifteen minutes or more to reach the People's Banking and Trust Company's place. While the cash was being counted out for him, Arthur wrote his check for fifty dollars.

"Now I reckon you'll be back again Monday, and want to fool around some more," snapped the irate uncle, as he handed over the bills.

"No—I can't come back any more," Arthur told him.

Up at the People's Trust Company a long line blocked his path. He tried to get through it. Men pushed him unceremoniously aside.

He tried to pass, though this would bring him on the wrong side of a line that reached beyond the receiving teller's window to get to the other where the paying teller was trying to eat up the last moments by the slowest counting of money he had ever sweated over.

"Where do you want to go?" snapped a tired guard. "Get in line."

"I want to put some money in," Arthur announced.

Mere magic could not have wrought the effect of those words. It seemed as if the whole line heard them. Men craned their necks; men passed the news to those who strung out clear around the corner.

"Put money in?" gasped the guard.

"Put money in?" cried the cashier, who had caught the words through the grill.

"It's some of what Whitlock took," Arthur stated simply.

"They've got back some of Whitlock's money." The word passed forward and back from the opening the guard forced through the line.

"It's Whitlock's stolen money," the news became before it reached the paying teller's window.

"Is that straight?" the man at the window asked from the three men behind him.

"Look at the roll he's handing in," was the convincing answer.

"Oh, hell, what's the use of losing a lot of interest?" grunted the man before the window.

"Lord, man—I believe you've saved the bank. That fellow up there has just about fifty dollars more coming to him than we

have left." The cashier was saying this to Arthur. "We couldn't have held him up fifteen minutes and then turned him down. We can make this last—and then we've a day and three-quarters to get ready for Monday."

He gripped Arthur's hand in one cold and sweaty. Dully Arthur let the other officials shake that same hand. Dully he watched the line thin out, until it was but a straggling half dozen with whom the teller could dally along in stretching a few thousand until the hour when the bank could close without closing for good.

He was glad when they were through, when he could get back into the open air.

He had been honest. Somehow the satisfaction of a good conscience was lost in the knowledge that his honesty had left him in just the plight his matrimonial venture had become at the beginning.

He had but five dollars in the world, and the week's wages waiting for him at the office. And the bills—yes, just as before—waiting for ten dollars more than all he possessed in the world.

He went back and worked out his afternoon at the factory—the place to which he had given the extra enthusiasm and energy five thousand dollars had seemed to demand, the place which would never square things with him as he had just squared himself with the rest of the world.

"Well, Eleanor, what shall we do?" he asked mournfully, as they greeted each other that evening.

"We'll know we're honest, Arthur," she answered, bravely. And then she began to sob on his shoulder.

"Is it—is it worth the sacrifice?" he asked her.

"Oh, I hope we'll get to believe so," was the best she could answer.

"It means no Hilda in the kitchen."

"I've given her notice," Eleanor spoke more firmly.

"It means move out of this house—let it go."

"I tried to start the packing," she said, with a catch in her voice. "I couldn't do it."

"We'll have to. Next week the payment is due. The piano and Hilda's wages will take ten dollars more than I have now."

"How much have you?" she asked, but without any real interest.

"This," he said, pulling four bills and a little change from his trousers pocket;

"and this," he added, taking the unopened pay envelope from his vest.

He tossed them both contemptuously upon the table.

Idly she counted the money. Idly she opened the envelope.

"What's that?" Arthur asked, as a slip of paper fell out with the tinted check. "Great Heaven! If he's fired me on top of it all—"

"But—but—" Eleanor's eyes were staring at the check. "Why, Arthur—what's this? Arthur! Look here! Arthur!"

But he had picked up the slip of paper. His eyes too were bulging.

"Listen to this," he shouted. "Eleanor, listen to this! He says my improvements have made good. He says—he says they've made him fifty thousand dollars. And—what's that check for? He speaks of a bonus. What—"

"It's—it's five thousand dollars," Eleanor whispered as if the words scared her.

"And my salary is to be fifty a week hereafter. Old Morrison—he says I've been showing myself worth more wages. I—"

"We can keep the house," he fairly shouted.

"We can save the piano."

"We can live—we can put a little by for that new one when he comes."

"Oh, Arthur—aren't you glad you took that money back to the bank?"

But words were not sufficient for them. They were in each other's arms again. Eleanor was sobbing as she had not sobbed before. Arthur found his eyes growing misty.

And, somehow, they both found themselves finishing their happy embrace on their knees.

His Mad Move on the Movies



by

Stephen Brandish

Author of "The Name of Martin Hoffman," etc.

A THREE-PART STORY—PART ONE.

CHAPTER I.

FORTUNE'S ROLLER-COASTER.

"WAR babies!" echoed Thomas Morely, artist.

"War babies," repeated his very good friend, James Darton, quite serenely.

"How much did you invest in them?"

"Every cent I owned, Tommy—nearly eight thousand dollars. Twenty-eight hundred and something, which I had saved, and the five thousand that came to me from poor old granddad's estate."

Mr. Morely smiled sadly. In the ripe wisdom of his thirty years, he felt that he understood fully.

Young Jimmy Darton—a mere child, since he was a good three years Morely's junior—was a rising writer of popular fiction; two or three of his longer stories had made quite a hit and two or three of his feature motion pictures had received favorable notice.

But Jimmy was a million miles from being a business man! If Jimmy's eight thousand had been dropped into war stocks, something told Mr. Morely that never again would Jimmy see even eight of their component cents!

"When did you do this rash thing, James?" he asked drearly.

"Precisely one year ago to-day," Darton grinned. "My second cousin, Petey Hendrix, is the greatest shark that ever paid office-rent in Wall Street. Petey can put his forefinger on a share of stock, shut his eyes and tell what it'll sell for seven months hence."

"Is this gift making *him* any richer?" Morely interrupted dryly.

"He salted away ninety-two thousand last year—and he keeps three cars at that and has a bridge-fiend for a wife."

"I take it all back," murmured the artist. "Go on."

"Well, I gave the eight thousand to Petey, told him I wanted it to go into war babies and make all it could in one year—and left all the details to him absolutely. I knew mighty well that once I'd begun to follow market reports I'd stop writing, and we made a solemn pact that I wasn't to know a solitary thing about what he was doing, or what he had made for me, until the year was up. He's coming here this morning, with the profits in cash—and that's why *you're* here, Tommy."

"To see the cash, eh?"

"Exactly!" chuckled the younger man, as he dropped into his pet armchair and found his cigarettes. "You're the best little pal a man ever owned, Tommy, and I wanted you to share my joy. After we've counted it over a few times, we'll have all the luncheon that money can buy and then I'll let you watch me deposit it in the bank."

His beaming smile found no vivid reflection on Morely's rather sober countenance. The artist merely nodded and looked absently around the familiar two-and-bath which Darton maintained in the small apartment hotel.

They were comfortable rooms, comfort-

ably furnished; Mr. Morely found himself wondering whether, when the crash was over and Jimmy really understood that he had lost eight thousand dollars, he would renew his lease here or shift to a cheap boarding-house and begin saving anew for the benefit of the Wall Street octopus.

"It is customary," said Darton, "to say a few kind words in a situation like this. You might tell me how far-sighted I was in stipulating that I wasn't to know a thing about what was going on, Tommy. You might say a little about how you hope I'll invest the winnings wisely and all that sort of thing."

"Say, do you honestly think you've made money?" the artist demanded.

Darton's eyes sparkled for a moment.

"Tommy, for the last year I've torn the market report out of every paper before I began to read it—that's on the level. But at the same time I've got ears and I've heard people talking about the way most of the war stocks have been soaring—and I've got no end of faith in Petey. I wouldn't breathe it to anybody else, but I'll bet my hat I've made a clean ten thousand dollars!"

"Is it a good hat?" asked Mr. Morely.

"Seven dollars and brand new."

"Well, you keep it, James," the artist sighed, "because I feel in my bones that you're not going to buy another for many, many months. I don't croak, you know that; as a rule I can be as optimistic as the next fellow, but when it comes to this stock market game—war babies or any other kind of get-rich-quick speculation—it is my humble opinion that—"

The telephone tinkled.

"Send him right up!" directed Mr. Darton, and despite his effort a certain excitement sent his voice higher. "Petey's here, Tom."

"The sooner you know, the quicker you'll begin to recover," remarked Mr. Morely.

Out in the tiled hall the elevator gate rattled back and a quick step rapped its way toward Jimmy Darton's small establishment. Even before it had reached the door, Darton himself had opened it—and in came a plump, smooth-shaven, rosy little man of forty or so, with blue eyes of child-like innocence, a chronic disarming smile and a small brown grip.

He slapped Darton's shoulder in passing, shook Morely's hand briefly, and set the grip on the table.

"Is the company in the know, Jimmy?" he asked, eyeing Morely.

"The company is here to see the show," Darton explained. "Well? I've won something—eh?"

Hendrix nodded with unusual gravity.

"The big year is up, James, and you have won—something, yes. Not as much as you expected to win, perhaps, but you didn't come out a loser."

"Did you get that?" Darton asked his friend, quite triumphantly.

"Heaven be praised!" breathed the artist.

Plump Mr. Hendrix pre-empted the arm-chair beside the table and pointed to the sofa where Morely sat.

"You go over and camp beside your little friend, Jimmy, and I'll tell you the worst in short order and then get back to work. I've no business being up-town at this time of day, but I promised you to bring the cash in person. Why on earth did you want cash anyway? Did that poor, cracked author-brain think it was going to gloat over a million or so?"

"Maybe not. Go on, Petey."

"I bought a neat little note-book for ten cents a year ago, and kept a record of your particular case in it," grunted Mr. Hendrix, as he opened the bag and placed it on his knees. "You can have it and read it, if you like; I've no time to spin the details now. Most of it was done in Paddlebury Steel, common—pyramiding it, you know. Here—catch!"

A yellow bundle shot across the room and landed in Darton's lap.

"Your original capital," explained the visitor. "Eight thousand. Here!"

"What's this?"

"*Five thousand dollars!*" exclaimed Mr. Morely. "Did eight thousand actually earn that much in a year?"

"It actually did!" said Mr. Hendrix. "Catch this, too."

"*Another five?*" ejaculated Darton.

"No, another ten thousand!" corrected his second cousin. "Don't drop 'em like that, put 'em beside you. Next! Here she comes, Jimmy!"

"Ten thousand more!" gasped the writer.

"And still ten thousand more—which makes twenty-five thousand so far," grunted the visitor, rummaging through his grip. "I—where the dickens is it? I've got all manner of junk in this bag; I'll have to clean it out and—"

"Say! You've made twenty-five thou-

sand dollars!" Morely came near to screaming.

Peter Hendrix glanced up with his placid baby smile.

"I knew it must be here somewhere," he said. "Here, Jimmy—take this. It's yours."

"Thousand—dollar—gold-notes!" Darton cried, with hoarse incredulity.

"Yes—eighty of them—eighty thousand dollars," his second cousin explained blandly as he closed his grip. "I didn't charge off any commissions, Jimmy, because it's all in the family, so you get the whole benefit. Your eight thousand dollars made one hundred and five thousand dollars for you, and since you wanted it in cash you have it in cash. I *should* have done better than that for you, Jimmy; I would have done better, honestly, if we hadn't been so infernally busy at the office all year long. Still, considering—"

"Petey!" young Mr. Darton choked. "I—I can't believe it yet! I don't know how to thank you."

Hendrix looked at his watch, glanced up with mild astonishment and then arose.

"Oh, that's all right, Jimmy," he said. "Do as much for you any time, you know. Bring me another eight thousand some day when we're not so rushed and perhaps I can make some real money for you. And now be a good little author and put it in the bank before somebody tries to get it away from you. Farewell, my son. Goodby, Morely. . . . Yes, I'm awfully sorry to rush off like this, but I have a fortune of my own to accumulate."

He was gone. Darton stood by his open door until the elevator car had dropped from sight; when he closed the door he turned the key and regarded Morely with eyes that fairly glittered.

"Say! *Can you beat it?*" coarsely inquired the writer of some polite fiction.

"I think you're the luckiest thing on legs!" Morely said.

"Why—why—there's one hundred and thirteen thousand dollars on that table!" stammered Darton. "That's nearly an eighth of a million in real money, and it's all mine."

"And what are you going to do with it?"

Mr. Darton sat down beside his wealth and smiled softly—and more calmly—at his best friend.

"I may as well tell you now," he said. "I had a—sort of notion to keep it quiet

until I saw how this thing came out; but since Petey's managed a miracle, I may as well confess to you that about thirty thousand dollars of this is going to build one of the slickest suburban homes in the State!"

"You're going to build yourself a house?"

"I mean to build a house for—*us*!" corrected Darton. "I'm going to be married in another two months."

"Sibyl Dane?"

"Yes! It was settled last week, just before she started on that visit to her Chicago sister's. It's a fact, Tommy; she's actually willing to marry me!" breathed the writer; and then nodded sharply: "Well, why not congratulate me?"

Thomas Morely smiled with that odd lack of enthusiasm so frequently apparent when one's best friend is about to leave the bachelor state and drift away forever.

"I do congratulate you, Jimmy. She's—er—a wonderful girl. I—do congratulate you, of course. I'm sure you'll both be very happy."

"Still, don't work yourself all up about it, like that," Darton remarked. "Don't cheer and prance around like that and—Tommy!"

"What?"

One hand on his amazing collection of money, Darton grew quite solemn.

"This seems to be my big day," he said. "Shall I tell you the rest of it?"

"Has anything more happened to you?"

"One other exceptionally nice thing is about to happen," grinned the writer. "Next week the 'Fate of the World' is going to be bought by the Trimmer Film Corporation!"

Morely's eyes opened.

"The big feature picture you've been working over so long, Jim?"

"The scenario of the very biggest motion picture any one ever attempted!" said Darton. "I spent three solid months working that out, Tommy; I made up my mind that I'd do the biggest photoplay in the history of the business, and—I don't want to brag, but I do believe 'The Fate of the World' is just that!"

The artist nodded thoughtfully.

"So the Trimmer people are going to buy it, eh?"

"It seems to be settled. Park, the head of the scenario department, told me last Thursday that he stood ready to buy it and make it the greatest feature picture up to date, and that he was only waiting for the O. K. of Thorndyke Trimmer, the head of

the firm. Park said that he'd put it through this week and about next Tuesday or Wednesday a check and a contract should be here."

"How much?" Morely inquired.

"Park couldn't put a price on it until he had talked to Trimmer, and I wouldn't fix one because I think they'll pay more than I'd dare ask," said Darton. "That picture, you know, is something I've taken more seriously than anything I ever wrote before, Tommy. You may think it ridiculous, but I do believe that once that thing is shown my reputation as a motion picture writer will be established for good. Foolishly or otherwise, I'm counting on it to put me at the top of that particular ladder with one jump . . . they can hardly offer less than ten thousand for it, I think. I'd take that."

Mr. Morely, lips parted wonderingly, leaned forward.

"James," said he, "do you really believe that any motion picture producer is going to give up ten thousand real dollars for—"

Luckily, perhaps, since a sudden scowl had appeared on young Mr. Darton's face, the telephone gave him pause at this point. The writer of super-pictures, listening, frowned and then said:

"Well . . . ask him to come up, of course. . . . Don't look around for your hat; it's only Bostwick."

"What Bostwick?"

"Sibyl's father's partner—Bostwick & Dane. You've met him—yes, you have; you met him at the Danes' six months ago, the night they gave the dinner."

"The kiln-dried old man?"

"You can stand him for ten minutes," laughed Darton, as he slid the money into the table drawer. "We can beg off after that. But what under the sun is he doing up here at this time of day?"

The artist shook his head and settled back again with a somewhat resigned sigh. Usually he gave one the impression of suppleness and quick motion and good cheer, but his joints all but cracked as he rose to shake hands with elderly Mr. Bostwick and his smile was almost painful.

Not that there was anything tiresome or repulsive about old Mr. Bostwick, of course, but he grated on Morely, who was not engaged to his partner's only daughter; it may have been the quick, razor-edged glances that shot from the pale, small blue eyes; it may have been that Mr. Bostwick affected a glistening, old-fashioned silk hat

at all hours and carried a gold-headed cane and wore white spats.

Darton, however, greeted his future father-in-law's associate quite effusively. He saw him comfortably settled and then took a near-by chair with a bright:

"Dropped in for a little chat, did you? That was good of you, Mr. Bostwick."

The pale eyes darted at him.

"Hum—was it?" asked the thin, dry voice. "May change your mind about that very shortly, Darton."

"Eh?"

Mr. Bostwick squinted straight at him.

"I never was a man to beat about the bush, Darton. I don't like this job—I don't like it a little bit," he said unpromisingly.

"What job?"

"The one Dane has handed me, damn him!" clucked Dane's partner. "See here, young man! You're expecting to marry Sibyl, I take it?"

"Why—yes."

"Stop expecting it!"

Young Mr. Darton frowned and, be it admitted, lost a little of his high color.

"What does that mean, Mr. Bostwick?"

"She's married already!"

"What?"

"She was married last night, in Chicago! She married young John Rossmore—the tinsplate Rossmore's—elder son, worth a million. There! That's off my mind, thank God!" ticked Mr. Bostwick and, thumping his cane just once by way of putting a period to his news, sat back with a grunt.

Jimmy Darton clutched the arms of his chair and sat, mouth wide open, for ten seconds before he was able to gasp:

"That—that's a lie! I don't believe it! I don't—"

"You flatter me, young sir!" Bostwick said crisply. "I haven't brought affidavits to corroborate me, and I have no idea of going down on my knees and begging you to say that you think me honest. Believe it or not—and be hanged to you! That's what *happened*! They've gone straight to the Coast, with the idea, I believe, of honeymooning in Honolulu, or something like that."

"But I—I can't believe—Sibyl—" Darton choked brokenly.

"That's because you're young, blinded and more or less of an ass," Bostwick said cheerfully, albeit more kindly. "We all are at your age, you know. Except for that,

you'd have sandbagged the girl and kidnaped her before you let her go to Chicago. She knew Rossmore for years before she met you, Darton; she was engaged to him for six long, beautiful months. Umum."

"I never knew—that. And I don't believe it, either!" the writer said less energetically.

"It is the fact, nevertheless," the old gentleman chuckled grimly, as he sighted along his shining black cane. "Heigho! Don't wiggle like that, Darton. It really amounts to nothing at all, I assure you. A year hence you'll be married to a dizzy little blond or a striking brunette person, if your matrimonial bee keeps on buzzing, and when you pass Sibyl on the street you'll each have to look twice before you place the other. I know. However, this is not business, is it? I came to talk business."

Jimmy Darton could no more than stare at him.

"Dane and I have talked the thing over before, since you seemed in a fair way to join the Dane family, you know," Mr. Bostwick went on. "He meant to run in and see you about it last night—before the news about Sibyl came in—and this morning he informed me that the elopement nonsense shouldn't make a particle of difference, so far as you were concerned, because he likes you, my boy. Darton, your big chance has come!"

"What big chance?" Darton wanted to know.

"You're going to Bingalong!" Mr. Bostwick declaimed triumphantly.

"Going to what?" Morely ejaculated.

"What do you make out of this scribbling on an average, Darton?" Bostwick continued. "Twenty dollars a week? Twenty-five?"

"Fully that," the writer replied acidly. "But—"

"Well, in charge of our branch at Bingalong, sir, as purchasing agent of Bostwick & Dane for the Philippine Islands—and the whole China coast, for that matter—you will draw just thirty-five hundred dollars a year!" The senior partner spoke impressively and thumped in some more emphasis with his cane. "Thirty-five hundred dollars a year, Darton! If anybody had offered me thirty-five hundred dollars a year at your age, I'd have collapsed."

"But—"

"Your ignorance of the business will count for nothing; young blood and plenty

of punch is what we're after. Blaisdell, the chap who's retiring and coming home, will stay four months with you and break you in to everything, and you'll have his quarters and his two native servants—both items charged against the firm, by the way. It's the chance of a lifetime, boy, and I'm glad to see you getting it. You sail to-night!"

"But—"

"You go straight through to Bingalong on the old Angoria—Pier 10—through the Panama Canal, if it happens to be working at the time, and around the Horn if it isn't. The sea trip itself will make a new man of you—gad! how I wish I could step into your shoes, Darton!" Mr. Bostwick exclaimed heartily, as he rose. "Now get to your packing!"

"Wait!" Jimmy Darton cried.

"Eh?"

"I—I'm not going to any Binga—whatever it is! If you want to step into my shoes, go ahead and step and be a new man yourself. I—I—why, what in blazes should I go to the Binga place for? I'm satisfied here and I haven't made as little as thirty-five hundred for four years now!"

"*Huh?*" gasped Mr. Bostwick, and unadulterated amazement shot from his eyes.

"I'm—awfully obliged if it's a real opportunity that you're offering me and I don't want to seem ungrateful, but my humble idea of the last thing in the world to do is getting aboard a worn-out tramp steamer and going to the Philippine Islands. I—"

"Say! Are you—are you turning down our offer?" Mr. Bostwick asked thickly.

"Thanking you—yes! And now tell me about Sibyl! Did she—"

"Why—why—drat Sibyl!" stammered Mr. Bostwick. "I—upon my soul and honor, I've never been so offended in my life! I—oh, see here, Darton; don't be an idiot. We've had brilliant, experienced men hounding us for this job, a month or more, and we have saved it for you. Don't let pique over a fool girl's jilting knock your perspective all to flinders. Get to your packing, lad! Don't sulk; just rip into Bingalong and a big future!"

His lightning squint shot encouragingly at Darton; he patted Darton's shoulder, too, which was quite unlike him; but Darton only sank deeper into his chair and smiled drearily and shook his head. Second by second as the fact of Sibyl's loss drilled

into his understanding, the very soul within him was crumpling.

"See here, Darton!" Mr. Bostwick snapped. "Are you turning it down flatly?"

"As flatly as I know how," muttered the younger man.

Then he hunched down farther and sighed so that the whole chair shook, while Mr. Bostwick glared at him. He did not glance up, even when with the briefest of farewells, Mr. Bostwick stamped out. Only at Morely's soothing touch did he rouse a bit.

"Never mind, old chap," the artist said. "If she was flighty and fickle as all that, it's a good thing you didn't get her."

Darton gazed at him dully—and then nodded a request that Morely open the door, for some one was knocking. Dully, too, he watched the artist take a somewhat battered paper package from the bell-boy; and his thick, uninterested voice asked:

"What was it, Tom?"

"Er—a bunch of rejected manuscript, I guess, from the looks of the thing," Morely answered. "Here's a printed rejection slip, with something written on the margin. It says: 'Pretty rotten after all on second reading; most of it has been done before. Park.' That's all, except—"

"*Park!*" Darton howled suddenly, and the sound was almost animal. "What—what is the manuscript? It can't be—"

"It's the—the 'Fate of the World,'" Morely said very gently indeed.

CHAPTER II.

DRIVEN MAD.

IT is a difficult thing to maintain one's poise when one has acquired a fortune, lost a bride and seen one's most serious bit of work scorned, all in a matter of half an hour. Jimmy Darton, Fate's newest toy, made no attempt whatever to keep his mental balance.

With another dread sound, which was partly the same howl and partly a new roar of fury, he bounded from his comfortable chair and landed beside the table on which his friend had placed a certain thick pile of smudgy, typewritten sheets. An impolite snatch and he had acquired the rejection slip and was glaring at it with burning eyes.

"Trimmer Film Corporation—yes, and that's Park's writing, too! It's a fact,

Tommy! They've thrown down the 'Fate of the World!' They've thrown it down cold!"

"I see that, Jim, but don't—"

Darton gulped loudly and hurled the accursed slip from him.

"Why, it was only last Thursday morning that I sat in that scoundrel's office and went over the thing with him, episode by episode, and he was so enthusiastic that he had to get up and walk around and wave his hands every five minutes! He planned to run it in an entirely new form, for that kind of picture—six separate episodes, four reels to each one, bringing them out every two weeks and then leasing the whole thing to make a two-evening feature. He sat there and told me himself—"

"You'll have the house detective here if you yell much louder!" Morely suggested.

"I don't care a continental if the whole New York police force comes in here, I'll say what I have to say—to you first and then go out to the studio to say it over to Park! That 'Fate of the World' is the greatest thing ever attempted in the movie line, and the only reason it was turned down is that Park decided to steal it without paying a cent!"

"Well, Jimmy—"

"It's the fact! Park's up to it! And there are plenty more in the movie business to steal it, even if he didn't!" Mr. Darton choked. "I don't say they're all crooked; they're not, by any means. But there are so many men like Park and so many concerns like the Trimmer Corporation that any man who's ass enough to sit down and write movie plots—"

Here breath failed him. Morely smiled compassionately.

"Just for the moment, Jimmy, you sit down and calm yourself," he suggested. "Then—"

"And if he didn't steal it, he turned it down because he didn't dare buy it—that's right: didn't dare!" Darton thundered on. "He turned it down because it was so far ahead of anything their beastly staff writers could turn out that if they'd ever bought it and produced it both Trimmers would have come down on their staff and fired them for not thinking up something themselves that made as big a sensation!"

"Maybe," Morely assented.

Passing the cigarettes as inadequate, Darton bit the end from a black cigar.

"There's no maybe about it!" he de-

clared. "That's at the bottom of the whole business! That's what makes all the utter rot you have to look at when you go to a movie show, I tell you! Why does the same villain lure away the same innocent maiden—why does the same hero rescue her at the last moment—a thousand times a year? Why does the same old wife fall in love with the same old best-friend-of-her-husband, why does the same comedian fall down in the same way, over and over and over? Why have a billion pies been smashed on the faces of a billion poor devils, male and female, on the supposition that it is funny—when the whole world is full of new comedy ideas?"

"You speak words of great truth, James," said his friend, "but at the same time I think that elevator boy's going to report a fight in here when he gets downstairs. He stopped the car a good two minutes that last trip and listened, and I heard him talking to somebody."

"Well, all those things happen because a good part of the movie manufacturers have a paid staff of scenario people in their office and every man who doesn't turn out so and so many reels loses his job," Darton continued, unheeding. "No gang of men that ever lived could keep up that clip and still have a flow of original ideas; and I doubt if any of them try to be original any more, and I doubt still more greatly if they'd be paid for it if they did! And given those conditions, what chance has a really big, new, striking, dramatic idea of getting past that crowd?"

"Mighty little, perhaps, but you knew it all before, and—"

"Even though I did know it, I thought that anything as good as 'The Fate of the World' *must* have a chance!" cried Darton. "I thought there must be somebody in the business who knew a good story when he saw it—a real story! That's what people want when they pay their ten cents or their fifteen cents or their quarter to see a movie show—the story! Everybody in the world knows that now except the people who turn out the pictures; if you don't believe it, ask the man who sits next you in the subway, ask your doctor or your lawyer or your iceman or the fellow who brings home your shirts from the laundry! They all go and they all yawn through four rotten pictures to see one good one, and . . . say, I'd like to get back at the movie business!"

"Well, you can't," said his friend, "and now if—"

Mr. Darton shook his presumably impotent fists at the unoffending ceiling.

"I spent more time, more thought, more care on that 'Fate of the World' than I've put on most full-length novels!" he rasped. "It's all real, new, gripping plot from one end to the other; nobody knows what's coming next; nobody hides behind a match or a piano-stool to watch the villain ten feet away—who never sees him; nobody fumbles around in a table drawer to get out the pistol everybody knows he's going to commit suicide with; no group of loons stands around, all taking off their hats and bowing together when somebody is killed! No. . . . I *would* like to get back at the movie business for throwing down the 'Fate of the World'!"

Then, with a gusty snarl, Mr. Darton subsided into the depths of his chair and groaned aloud; and his friend sighed and asked patiently:

"Are you all through?"

Darton did not answer.

"Because, if you are, Jimmy, I'll tell you a few sad facts about your 'Fate of the World.'"

"What are they?"

"I happen to know them, because you told me most of the details of the plot when you were writing it. Some other people know them, for reasons which you will understand in a minute. But you, apparently, do not know them!"

Darton stared blackly at him.

"What on earth are you talking about?"

"How long ago did you finish that thing, Jim?"

"About four months back."

"Started right out peddling it then?"

"I had a ridiculous notion that the Omnium Features people were going to buy it; I sent it straight to them."

Morely smiled pensive sympathy.

"How long did they keep it, Jim?"

"A month or more."

"And turned it down without any explanation?"

"They said it was too big, I believe; they said they might use parts of it," Darton said drearily.

"And then it went to?"

"Oh, the Scopia people, I think. They're a dozen different companies, you know, and they said it would take some time to consider. They kept it two months and

then sent it back with a fool letter that meant nothing at all."

"After which you gave it to Park?"

"I did. What's the point of all this?" Darton demanded.

Mr. Morely shook his head.

"I wanted to check up, Jimmy, and I've checked beautifully. Of course, there is no sure way of holding any one accountable; no power under the sun can prove that the same idea didn't occur to the same people at the same time—but some of your 'Fate of the World' has been pinched, I think."

"Hey?"

"The Omnium concern brought out a six-reel feature last month based on the idea of a man who looked exactly like the world's greatest financier being shipwrecked with him and floating around on a raft that couldn't hold both of them for more than an hour or two!"

"Is that a fact?"

"They called it 'Who Sank?' and I've seen it commented upon in a dozen places as a winner. I tried to see it, and didn't make it."

"Tommy!" gasped the writer.

"And there was a Scopia Black Vulture feature released last week which dealt with a man who tried to buy America for cash."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Why, of course, I'm sure of it," said Morely. "I did see that one, and while it wasn't the same plot, the idea was the same."

"But—"

"And not to keep you in suspense any longer, I'll tell you that I've heard hints—and pretty well authenticated hints at that—that the newest Trimmer Feature will have as a basic idea the buying up of all the world's shipping by one secret syndicate. That is all."

"I'll get an injunction!" roared the writer.

"Try it, anyway," his friend smiled.

"I'll go and shoot Park!" the maddened one pursued, quite irresponsibly. "I'll take that—"

"I wouldn't yell threats of murder like that," Morely said sharply. "That's downright idiotic, you know. You've no idea of shooting anybody, but people have been electrocuted for little slips like that."

Snow-white as to cheek, gritting as to teeth, Mr. Darton clenched his fists and merely vibrated for many seconds, until returning breath permitted a low and terrible:

"Well, I'll get back at them somehow, Tommy! I swear that!"

"You'll forget it, which is the wisest thing!"

"I'll never forget it! I'll walk into the whole motion picture industry and clean it out! D'ye hear me? Clean it out! I'll make them all suffer together, Tommy, the good and the bad, until—"

"Piffle!" said his friend. "Dry up. You'll have a stroke of apoplexy in another minute or two."

"There's no piffle about this!" the outraged writer thundered. "I mean every word of it. The crooks in that beastly business have stepped on one man too many, and I'm the man. Now they shall all catch it together, and—"

Morely's slightly weary smile halted him. Controlling himself with a visible effort, Darton stood quite still, and when next he spoke his voice was almost normal.

"You think I'm crazy, eh? Well, maybe I am. But I'll get back at that motion picture industry just the same, Tommy."

"Try it, and they'll tie you up in a knot and drop you on the scrap heap," said the artist, without great concern. "Now, sit down and finish your fit comfortably, and then we'll go and look over that Brobane collection of water-colors; that'll soothe you and interest me. . . . Oh, going to keep on walking? All right, then; walk!"

"I mean to walk until I've thought this thing out to a finish, and if you want to see any collection, hustle along and see it, Tommy. You may think me an idiot, but I'm not; I can fight the movie business because I've got something to fight them with."

"Eh?"

"You bet!" the author said enthusiastically. "I've got imagination, and that's a blamed sight more effective than bullets, sometimes!"

Hands deep in his pockets, the black cigar sending out clouds that suggested a destroyer running under forced draft, Mr. Darton strode heavily through his two rooms, glared at his reflection in the mirrored door of the bathroom, wheeled and strode back—paused by the piano and snarled at it and wheeled again—came face to face with himself in the mirror and pounded back to the piano, all the while emitting queer little wheezy rumbles.

Morely sat back patiently to await the passing of the storm.

Ten minutes of humming to himself, and it seemed to the artist that the thunder had died out; he inspected his old friend with new and hopeful interest. He found himself rather startled.

Darton's march had reached its end. He was standing by the window now, chewing his cigar and staring at the sky; but from where Morely sat the fixed pallor of Mr. Darton's usually rosy cheek was disconcerting.

It was the dead white of overwhelming emotion, and the glitter of Mr. Darton's eye would have seemed more in harmony with a padded cell than with the comforts of his living-room. Usually the mildest person in the world, when tried too far one of the hottest-tempered, Mr. Darton seemed to have gone beyond the boiling rage condition and to have attained something more ominous.

The smile with which he favored Thomas Morely was almost dreadful.

"I've got it!" he said briefly.

"Got what?"

"The way to stand the motion picture business on its head and bang its microscopic brains out!" Darton answered quite lucidly. "Come on!"

"Come where?"

"With me!" snapped the writer, as, with no apparent regard for its value, he drew his new fortune from the table drawer and stowed it, packet by packet, into the inner pockets of his coat.

"Oh! To the bank!" Morely smiled relievedly. "All right."

Jimmy Darton's pale lips curled in a most peculiar smile. He glided to the telephone, took it down, listened and barked:

"Taxi! Quick!"

"Going to ride, eh?" Morely grinned comfortably, as he put on his hat. "You can afford luxuries now, James. Say! What a perfectly incredible thing it is, isn't it? To think that Hendrix brought you a whole bagful of money just—that isn't your hat, Jimmy; that's the letter-basket you're wearing. Your hat is over here, and—Jimmy!"

"What?" snarled the writer, as he hurled the unoffending wire affair to the corner.

"For Heaven's sake, *calm down!* You're not the first man in history to be handed a low-down deal by the movie business—or any one of a thousand other businesses. Be a sport, James, and forget it. Write the great American novel and some day—"

Then Mr. Morely followed his friend, who was already jabbing at the elevator button; and Darton's expression told him quite convincingly that he had not even heard the words of wise counsel.

Jimmy Darton was certainly in bad shape! Morely realized it more thoroughly as they sat in the taxi, whirling off to an address he had not caught, but which he assumed, of course, to be that of Darton's bank; for as he glanced at the busy streets Jimmy's incisors bit through his cigar and the lighted portion rolled to his knee and remained there all unheeded until Morely picked it up and threw it into the street. The rest of the weed Darton seemed to have swallowed without discomfort—than which there could be no stronger evidence of absolute preoccupation.

What Jimmy needed was a sustaining luncheon amid ultra-conventional surroundings, with enough people staring at him to make him behave like a sane being. / Jimmy, of course, was sore about the Sibyl affair; it had been Morely's observation that they usually raved more or less under like conditions; but with a tableful of dainty French cookery before him and half a dozen pretty girls in sight—well, it would be the first step on his road to recovery.

So as soon as they had deposited the money, Morely fancied, he'd have the man drive to—

"Where are you going?" he asked, as the cab stopped and he gazed at one of New York's largest stationery houses, just across the Fifth Avenue sidewalk.

Mr. Darton, beckoning impatiently for him to follow, was already passing through the door. In some bewilderment Thomas Morely stepped down and after his friend—and he came up with the latter just as Darton faced a very superior young man behind the counter and demanded:

"What's the heaviest, finest white bond paper in the house, eight and a half by eleven inches?"

"You wish the very best?" The superior young man gazed at him coldly.

"And quick!"

The superior young man moved away with dignity and, returning, opened a box and smiled unpleasantly.

"This," said he, "is the heaviest bond on the market and the finest. It will cost you just ten dollars per ream of five hundred sheets."

Jimmy Darton, crumpling a sheet and

tearing off a corner with difficulty, nodded impatient approval.

"Envelopes to match this?"

"Of course."

"Same price?"

"Yes."

The obviously demented writer laid four one-hundred dollar gold notes on the counter.

"Twenty reams of the paper and ten thousand of the envelopes!" he snapped. "Don't bother having them wrapped; just load them into my taxi at the door. And don't stand there thinking about your beauty. *Move!*"

From the superior youth the dignity fell away; he paled slightly and his eyes were rather frightened. One white finger ran beneath his collar as if to ease his breathing; and then he caught Darton's eye, snatched up the money and raced away.

Darton reached out and gripped a haughty man in long frock coat who looked majestically over his establishment.

"Do you do your own engraving here!" Darton demanded.

"One of the—er—finest—"

"Do you do your own engraving here?" the writer snapped.

"We *have* it done by one of the finest—" the tall man began again, icily.

"Well, who is it?"

"The Kimpton Company, sir, and—" the other said quite warmly.

"Up on Forty-eighth Street?"

"Yes, and—"

"Thanks—all right. Here, you!" called Jimmy Darton to the younger clerk. "Give me what you're carrying and go back for the rest of it! Bring it all next trip; I can't stand around here all day waiting for this stuff. Hustle!"

"Jimmy!" Morely said faintly.

"Take those four boxes of envelopes!" replied his friend, as he staggered toward the door with his arms laden down.

Then he was gone, and when Morely attained the taxicab he found him seated and drumming on a pile of boxes, while he frowned impatience at the door which had already kept him waiting a good thirty seconds.

Thirty more, and the door rewarded him with a vision of the lately superior young clerk, who staggered out with a tottering pile of boxes and a dazed smile—and then the machine had turned up-town again and Morely was saying:

"Now, Jimmy, I don't—"

Darton laid a hand on his old friend's knee.

"Tom," he said, "I'd rather listen to you than to anybody else in the world, but just now I need every second for hard thought. Will you just sing your self a little song and look at the architecture for the next six or seven minutes, while I think? Thanks!"

Squelched, the artist edged into his own corner of the crowded cab and studied his friend's profile with a quizzical smile, the while he did some thinking of his own.

His thoughts dealt mainly with the advisability of calling the police and having Jimmy Darton taken somewhere for observation, but they had reached no definite goal when, with a satisfied grunt Darton stepped out again and threw over his shoulder:

"Come on, Tommy. I may want your opinion as an artist."

Morely passed a hand over his puzzled forehead and tagged obediently after into a new, office-like salesroom, where a brisk individual advanced to meet Darton. The writer came down to business at once.

"How many men can you put on a job at once? I want a plate engraved for a letter-head."

"Well, only one man—"

"Never mind that; how soon can I have it? Just an ordinary plate with ten or fifteen words engraved on it?"

"If it is a rush job, we might get it out for you within three or four days."

Darton shook his head and, twitching off a bit of wrapping paper, whisked out his fountain-pen.

"That'll never do; I have to have it by six o'clock to-night, sharp. Here! Here is what I want; look!"

Quite unaware that the other, after a start, was staring hard at him, Jimmy Darton sketched quickly. Morely, looking over his shoulder, saw first a neat arc, composed of "The American Committee," and under it the single word "for." And under the "for" as Morely watched appeared "The Protection of Motion Picture Writers."

CHAPTER III.

THE AMERICAN COMMITTEE.

ON the face of the thing, Jimmy Darton had gone stark, staring mad. The engraver man did not see this, of course, because he was not acquainted with Jimmy

Darton's usually calm, sane self; moreover, he was a square-chinned, practical person, just now wholly absorbed in the letters that flowed from Darton's fountain-pen.

But Thomas Morely saw it and felt that he understood. Sibyl Dane and "The Fate of the World" had done the infernal trick; these two blows, coming too swiftly and too heavily, had stood upon edge that high-strung quantity, James's reason!

At present it was rolling along swiftly toward the limitless nowhere! James needed friends badly, and Thomas Morely was glad that he stood at the poor young man's side; he braced himself for a quiet, strong protest—and even as he braced, Jimmy Darton was asking:

"Well? That won't take three days?"

"That, normally, would be the least time we should ask," replied the other. "At the same time, we have a couple of men here who are rated as the finest and fastest workers in the country and—is that all the lettering?"

Jimmy Darton shook his head.

"No. There's a little line in each corner. Here—like this:"

The pen scratched again. In one corner of the wrapping paper slip appeared: "James H. Darton, Chairman," which was mild enough; but the inscription for the other corner stung Morely, for it confirmed his worst suspicions. This latter line read: "Available Fund, \$10,000,000."

The clerk whistled softly.

"That's all. Can you do it for me on time?" Darton rapped out.

The clerk's eyes had not yet left the mystic "\$10,000,000."

"Not by six o'clock, perhaps, but—"

"Well—here!" Darton said impatiently. "I've brought you ten thousand sheets which I want stamped. I want one thousand of them before nine o'clock to-morrow morning and the balance during the day if possible; if you can't give me the whole ten thousand, I want them delivered, thousand by thousand, as soon as the ink on them is dry—and I want the ink doctored so that it'll dry in a very few minutes, too. Well?"

"You know, I presume, that it will cost quite a bit if we keep the two men here working into the night, and hold the stamper and his helper so that they're ready to go to work as soon as the plate is finished?"

Jimmy Darton, twitching something out of his side pocket, glanced at it, found that it was another one hundred dollar note and extended it with a care-free speed that chimed very nicely with the ten-million-dollar legend.

"If it's less than that send the change with the last thousand; if it is more, send the bill," he said. "Only stop talking and set 'em to work if you can do it."

The clerk drew a long, deep breath.

"This is an emergency job, Mr.—er—Darton?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll see it through for you, sir, whatever arrangements have to be made."

"Send a boy out with me to get the paper," concluded the author, as he started for the door again.

"But—one moment, please!" the other pleaded. "Aren't you going to have an address on the plate, Mr. Darton?"

The first halt in his mad career came while Jimmy Darton stared at the other in blank astonishment; it was a very brief halt, however, lasting no more than two or three seconds. Then he was moving outward again, and the clerk trotting at his side heard:

"You start 'em to work on the rest of it and I'll telephone in the address inside of an hour. I haven't—er—decided on which suite of offices I want, but I'm going downtown now to settle the matter. This is the paper: Leave the narrow boxes; those are the envelopes, and they're going with me.

"Got 'em all?" concluded Mr. Darton as, pushing his old friend ahead, he entered the cab and sat down with a thud. "All right. Cirrus Building, driver! Make as good time as you can!"

There was authority in his tone; the taxi was in motion even as he ceased speaking.

"Jimmy!" said Thomas Morely, quite firmly this time.

Mr. Darton looked at him absently.

"What the devil is all this nonsense?" Morely hurried on. "Have you lost your wits completely because a movie was turned down? I've always thought you were pretty steady, but it does seem that real money in your pocket and a little two-cent disappointment that most men would take with a grin after the first five minutes have sent you so far off—"

"I should say about the forty-fifth floor," murmured Darton.

"What on earth?"

"Because that's well up in the air and quiet. Yes, I'll get that if I can, or the next thing to it. It may just be that Park will turn up and start something, and I cannot visualize anything pleasanter than throwing him out of a forty-fifth-story window."

"Quite so," assented Mr. Morely. "Who's your family doctor, Jim? Still trust to Bill Kerrigan?"

Jimmy Darton half-started from his own meditations.

"Did you—ah—speak to me, Tom?" he queried. "Well, shut up, will you? I want to put this thing through *right* and I want to think it out as I go along. You see, I want to shoot the whole affair over like a high-power cyclone, and if I have to—er—stop anywhere along the—the line, as it were—"

His voice drifted off in the smoke of a fresh cigar and Tom Morely sat back with an amazed grunt.

The boy was demented, of course, but he didn't talk like a crazy man; except for the insane glitter in Jimmy's eye, a stranger might well have fancied him a gingery young captain of industry, worth the millions he had conjured out of thin air and bent on doubling them before sundown. There, with the cigar in his mouth and this new, compelling, razor-edged authority sticking out all over him . . .

Morely blinked several times at the phenomenon and concluded that a noisy taxicab was no place for the inculcating of reason through the medium of soft words.

The starter of the gigantic Cirrus Building, when the human tornado slowed down at his side and fired a question at his head, gave the information that the renting agent's office was on the twentieth floor, second bank of elevators, and then stood back and caught his breath. The half of it was still uncaptured when Jimmy Darton and his bewildered friend shot past the tenth story on the way up.

Frequently Thomas Morely had read of the maniac's characteristic cunning in feigning complete calm when, as a matter of fact, his whole brain-machine is turning hand springs, but now he really understood the gruesome phase for the first time.

Leaning there on the plate-glass counter, studying the ground plan of the tower which lay beneath the glass, Jimmy Darton might have been perfectly sane. His ques-

tions as to rent and size were quick and sharp, but this time he chanced to have encountered in the renting agent a gentleman normally as quick and sharp, who answered swiftly, tapped this office or that with his pencil, shot off figures and exhibited the form of lease, all with the same machine-gun speed.

In the end, Morely gathered, the south side of the forty-fourth floor was to let, at an enormous figure, contained six offices and satisfied Jimmy Darton's wild mind. At any rate, they were whining up to the skies in a little round elevator car; and now they had walked into beautiful, brilliant offices, where air boomed in Morely's ears and rivers and bridges showed as toys before his eyes.

"This big one's the reception-room; I'll get four large settees and ten chairs for it. I'll use this one for a sort of outer anteroom, to meet people I don't want to let in any farther—rug, flattop desk and chair and three armchairs. These next two I'll use for stenographers—three desks, three chairs, two filing cabinets in each; yes, I'll have rugs in here, too. It looks better.

"Aha! Telephone hasn't been taken out, yet, eh? You know the telephone people pretty well, Mr. Dixon; can you arrange to have the service on here before two o'clock?"

"Yep!"

"Good! Attend to it for me, please. This next room shall be yours, Tommy."

"*Mine?*" gasped the artist.

"Yours."

"Say! What in blazes do I want with a room down here, seventeen miles in the air, when I have—"

"And this big fellow in the corner will be my private office," concluded the chairman of the "American Committee," whatever that might be. "Half-past twelve, according to that clock, eh? I'm going to move in here by three o'clock, Dixon."

Even high-pressure Mr. Dixon could not keep a certain startled quality out of his smile; still:

"Everything will be clean and ready for you, sir!" he said, coming up bravely.

"I'll pay you three months' rent now and sign whatever lease you have ready when I get the furniture in; is that satisfactory?"

"It's not even necessary, sir. That'll be an even thousand dollars and—"

"Here," said Jimmy Darton, "is the thousand. Now, will you please have the

cleaners get at these windows and floors at once?"

Dixon fled headlong. Mr. Darton, considering his new and lofty domain with a smile of approval, turned to follow him. Morely, his best friend and most sincere well-wisher, caught both Mr. Darton's arms and backed him against the fireproof wall with a hard thud!

"Now, *you back up!*" he commanded, savagely.

"What on earth's the matter with you?" Darton inquired in amazement.

"Nothing—except that I'm going to quiet you down this time, if we wrestle out your devilish forty-fourth story window together!" the artist said firmly. "You've pulled enough crazy stunts for one day, my boy. Now I'm going to take you home with me—get it?—straight home!"

"We're going to have Bill Kerrigan come around with the hypodermic he uses for elephants, and pump you full of concentrated slumber—dope—squirrel antitoxin—whatever it is he uses for cases like yours! Hear me, Jimmy? That's your card for the rest of the day; now let's just walk quietly to the elevator."

Darton laughed impatiently.

"Forget it, Thomas," he said, cheerfully. "I'm not going home. I understand, fast enough; you mean well, but—"

"I'm going to do well, too, believe me!" went on the artist more soothingly. "Listen, Jim! Just listen, will you? You're not the chairman of any American Committee. There isn't any American Committee—just think a minute, Jim; try to think, old man. You know just as well as I do that there isn't any American Committee.

"And you haven't got ten million dollars, boy," said Morely, and despite himself his voice broke a little. "You've got something over a hundred thousand dollars on you—about one hundred and ten or eleven thousand dollars, Jim. Here! Let's get it out and count it and you can see for yourself; and then we'll take it to the bank and leave it there and then—"

Jimmy Darton, glancing at his watch, pushed his friend away unfeelingly, gazed at the concerned frown and then, reluctantly, relaxed for a minute.

"I know what you mean, Tom—you think I'm crazy. Well, I'm not, I assure you. The thing that has happened to me is that my disposition has turned upside down and it is turned for keeps. I've always been

honest and hard-working and I've always tried to do the right thing by everybody, man or woman, I ever had any dealings with; I've had a lot of faith in human nature—up to this morning. See?"

"Yes, but just because Sibyl—"

"I don't know which hurt worst, Sibyl or the motion picture business. Sibyl, as a matter of fact, I suppose, although things have been happening so fast that I haven't much idea of values as yet," and Darton smiled miserably. "But this much I do know: I can't take it out of Sibyl, but I *can* take it out of the movie business.

"Until this morning I've always been absolutely honest and law-abiding, but I'm not that any longer! Hereafter I'm an outlaw and a bandit! I'm the most irreclaimably dishonest individual in the United States! I don't care a hoot for morals and I'd rather swindle than eat, so that I'm swindling somebody connected with motion pictures. I'm a thousand-toothed reptile, and I'm going to bite a movie concern once a minute until that hundred and ten or eleven thousand dollars gives out!"

"Jim!"

"Or, if you want to take the other, glorified view of it, I'm going to hand something hot and explosive to a line of business that stands in need of some healthy castigation. I am fully aware that I haven't ten million dollars and equally aware that there is no 'American Committee' except in so far as I am it. But believe me, Thomas, I'm IT!" the fellow ended quite collectedly. "Now let's hustle along and buy the furniture."

He nodded what was meant for reassurance and hustled out; blinking, Thomas Morely caught up just in time to step into the elevator and accompany Mr. Darton on his dizzy drop to earth.

To a certain extent he had been disarmed, the artist discovered when they were again in the taxicab and in the thick of lower Broadway's traffic. Jimmy had not gone actually mad; he had turned deliberately dishonest, which in many ways of course was far worse.

He was out for blood, over twenty-one, laden down with real money and a free agent; just how Mr. Morely could turn him aside had become more of a puzzle—but Thomas, as has been said, was a real friend. He could not and would not forsake Jimmy Darton in the hour of his awful turmoil; he would stick to Jimmy at least until a path to safety and sanity revealed itself.

He even tried to imitate the brisk, jaunty stride with which Jimmy entered the big office furniture establishment.

There were desks to be had, running from fifteen dollars upward. The kind Jimmy Darton desired were decidedly of the upward, being solid mahogany and ranging from fifty dollars apiece for the typewriter desks to two hundred and fifty for the massive rolltop affairs.

There were chairs to be had, too, of a sort that belonged only in the nation's biggest banks, yet Jimmy purchased his way cheerfully through them and was unaware that the salesman's face was turning a rich purple from sheer excitement; and when it seemed that they had bought all the chairs in the universe, when a string of settees had been added to the list and a little bank of mahogany filing cabinets, they took the elevator to the top floor and bought some rugs—not inexpensive, tasteful little things such as would have served the average lawyer or commission man for his private room, but Oriental carpets for every one of the offices but the anteroom!

They were to be delivered between two-thirty and two-forty-five that afternoon, even if it became necessary to hire a few extra motor-trucks for the job. When the salesman drifted away with a handful of Jimmy Darton's yellow money he was gurgling out queer, choked little protestations that they should be on hand by two-fifteen!

"Jimmy, old man!" Morely said, when they were again beside their cab. "This is—er—great; honestly it is, but you're spending money like a drunken sailor."

"I'm fitting up offices for a ten-million-dollar organization," Darton grinned—although the two little red spots on his cheeks took any mirth from the grin.

"I know, but—"

"And now for typewriters—and I'd better lay in twenty thousand sheets of plain paper and five thousand sheets of carbon paper, too; don't let me forget that, Tom, will you? I guess I'll stick to the same old typewriter I've always used."

With that Mr. Darton entered his vehicle and was snapping orders at its driver.

In the big hall-like offices of the typewriter concern, Thomas Morely felt that he was attaining a sort of trance-state; he wished to protest, but from the dreamy distances whence he watched Jimmy Darton he could no more than smile vaguely.

Jimmy was buying typewriters now—seven of them, it appeared, six for the use of his staff and one for himself. He made sure of their delivery by having them lugged into sight and loaded on the little delivery wagon; then he demanded that six thoroughly capable young women be sent after them; and although simple Thomas Morely smiled at the absurdity of the request, the manager of the concern's employment bureau had not been telephoning fifteen minutes when he reported that six of the very best would present themselves at 4444 Cirrus Building at precisely three o'clock!

The feat of organizing the American Committee for the Protection of Motion Picture Writers, ostensibly a committee with ten million dollars at its command, a committee with furniture which certainly warranted some such assumption and still a committee which had not even shaped itself as a thought at eleven that morning, had been accomplished—and it was only a little past one o'clock!

"Say, Jim," said the artist, weakly, almost apologetically, "you'd better come and have some lunch now."

Jimmy Darton shook his head.

"I'm not hungry; I'll omit luncheon," he said with snap and finality. "But you go and eat, Tom, and then come back to the office, will you?"

"You'll surely be there, Jimmy!" the artist asked anxiously.

"Of course. And Tom."

"Well?"

"When you're through with luncheon, run up to my place—here's the key—and look in the lower left-hand drawer of the desk. You'll find a good-sized loose-leaf notebook in there with a black leather cover. Fetch it down to the office, will you? Do you want to take the cab?"

"No."

"Then I'll have the man run me back, carry up the envelopes and then wait around for the rest of the day, I think," murmured the chairman of the committee. "Don't forget the black book, Tom."

He was gone! The taxi, apparently, was learning his habits, for it started away before he had taken his seat and now, circumnavigating a surface car with one hand on the wheel, the alert driver leaned back for further orders.

The taxi vanished in the traffic, and Thomas Morely, reclining quite limply against the show-window of the typewriter

concern, smiled vaguely after the feverish thing.

But after all he was a healthy artist with a normal appetite and he did not smile for very long. He moved away and boarded an up-town car, and presently over luncheon he revolved the peculiar case of Jimmy Darton and tried to find the answer.

It had not arrived when his coffee cup was empty; he made for the water-color exhibit, since this was its last afternoon, and being an enthusiast in art matters, he dallied until long past three over the collection. Then, unexpectedly coming face to face with a clock, he returned rudely to the dreadful doings of the day and hurried to Jimmy Darton's snug and lately happy quarters.

The left-hand bottom drawer of the desk presented no difficulty, even to his preoccupied fingers. Before Thomas Morely lay the black book, and he hauled it out and turned the pages curiously.

Done up with Jimmy's characteristic neatness, the loose-leaf volume was nearly filled with typewritten names and addresses. The first half was headed "Fiction Writers," and listed scores of people Thomas Morely had heard about and hundreds of whose existence he had been quite unaware—writers who lived all the way from New York City to Spokane and San Diego; some with book and story titles after their names and with various mystic dates and memoranda appended.

The last half of the volume appeared quite full of motion picture people—scenario staffs of every concern in the country, neatly listed with addresses, some names starred, others marked with double crosses.

Thomas Morely shook his head; that strange sensation known as "a hunch" urged him to steal home with the volume, tear it page from page and burn the fragments. Yet he was a friend of Jimmy Darton's, and eventually, as the clock struck four, he slapped the book together and started down-town again.

CHAPTER IV.

JUSTICE!

ALTHOUGH he knew quite well what awaited him, Morely all but gasped when he passed the door of 4444 Cirrus Building. Several seconds he had paused in the corridor, gazing with an uneasy, ap-

prehensive smile at the new, still wet lettering: "The American Committee for the Protection of Motion Picture Writers. Entrance." But now sheer astonishment brought him to a standstill.

Across the big anteroom a glittering mahogany rail stretched from wall to wall; in the narrow space between it and the door a boy of sixteen or seventeen, important in new gray livery, sat sternly at a shining mahogany table. Beyond the rail, deep chairs, settees of mahogany and green leather furnished the room luxuriously—yet not more luxuriously than the glimpse of the room beyond!

In there stood the huge flattop Jimmy Darton had bought and more upholstered furniture, but the finishing touches were given to the whole affair by the thick Oriental carpet and the pretty girl so busily fitting new blotters to the desk pad. In the invisible region beyond typewriters pounded furiously; the pretty girl, with a final pat at the blotter, glanced at Mr. Morely and rustled off in their direction. Plainly, the American Committee, whatever its business might be, had settled down to business!

The boy rose and eyed Morely accusingly.

"Whoojeh wanter see?" he demanded.

"I—where's Mr. Darton?" the artist stammered, as he tried to open the gate in the railing.

"He can't see you unless you got an appointment. Got one?"

The artist nodded weakly.

"I—ah—yes. That is, I think I have," he said. "Tell him that Mr. Morely is here."

The boy vanished. Thomas leaned on the railing and sought to absorb more of the incredible scene.

The place might have been an ultra-prosperous brokerage establishment of some kind or—he ceased speculating on what it might have been and remembered what it was: the office of a young man temporarily bereft of his senses.

In the farther doorway the boy had ducked nimbly aside on his return trip, and Jimmy Darton, hair wild, was striding down on his old friend and demanding:

"Where on earth have you been?"

"Well, I—"

"Say, do you know that I've telephoned half over New York to find you? I thought you'd been run down by a car, or something of the kind. I was just going to call up

Police Headquarters and have 'em canvass the hospitals!"

"Well I—"

"Well, never mind, so long as you're here now. Got the book?" Mr. Darton hurtled on. "Yes, I see you have. Well, bring it in here, Tom—bring it in here quick! I've been waiting nearly two hours for that book!"

He jerked open the gate and beckoned Morely to follow him through to the private office—and the artist obeyed with misgivings of the direst kind.

If Jimmy had been excited before, he was quite beside himself now; his eye had the queerest, faintest hint of glassiness and shot about with a wild, twitching movement that suggested a fanatic or a drug fiend. Through the next room they went and then through two more, each of the latter with its three bright girls at three typewriters—and as Darton beckoned his whole feminine flock to follow after, eight of them landed in the magnificent office that had been allotted to Thomas Morely!

Jimmy Darton, his book on the desk and the mechanical device which held the leaves released, picked out section after section of typewritten pages and talked as he worked.

"Tommy!" said he, incisively. "Get rid of that scared look and settle right down to business please! I want you to help me by taking the fiction writers—the fiction writers, understand?"

"Er—I suppose so," stammered the artist.

"Go right down the list from start to finish and dictate the name and address of every one more than fifty miles from New York—get the idea?"

"No, I don't!"

Jimmy Darton restrained a visible desire to curse aloud in his impatience!

"Tom," said he, "my idea is that a letter mailed to-morrow afternoon to anybody within fifty miles of New York will get to him the following morning, Thursday morning. If they live farther off than that they'll hear from the committee by night letter through the telegraph company—also on Thursday morning. I want everybody in the business to get his letter from the committee, whether written or telegraphed, on Thursday morning!"

"Thursday morning!" the artist repeated.

"Now, dictate two hundred of the names to one of the girls and then two hundred to the next and then two hundred to the next; if you're not at the end of this particular

bunch by that time, the first girl will be ready for you again. Where you see a star, that means that I know the man well—or the woman, as the case may be—and that I want the letter started with the Christian name. Like this: Here's Patten Cotter, in Pittsburg—start it 'Dear Patten!'"

"And then write him a letter?" Morely asked hopefully.

"No; then stop right there and get on to the next!" Darton said, more confusingly. "The girl will stick it down in her book and understand what the 'Dear Patten' means when she comes to it. Where you see a single cross after a name, that means that I know the fellow, but not very intimately; start it off 'Dear Cotter' or 'Jones' or 'Smith' or whatever it may be. When you see a double-cross or nothing at all, you'll understand that I never met the individual, so you'll dictate just: 'My dear Mr. Cotter!'"

"Now, that settles that part, Tommy, and make all the time you can," concluded the writer. "You three girls come in here with me—or you come first, Miss Gray, and let the others make more carbons of the night letters until I'm ready for them."

He darted into the next room with the little black-haired girl at his heels.

Two of the young women walked out the other way; two more, after an instant, followed on their own initiative; the din of four typewriters clattered out on the still air of the forty-fourth story again and the brown-eyed girl, who looked as if she might have a sense of humor concealed somewhere, was smiling demurely at Tommy Morely and waiting with pencil poised for him to begin.

In a shuddery, bewildered way, the artist felt himself called upon to back up Jimmy Darton in his wild freak. He shut his teeth and blinked at the near-by sky for an instant, gathering his wits; he cleared his throat and sat down suddenly at the desk, picking up the first leaf of Jimmy's book.

"Let's—see," he muttered hoarsely. "Santa Barbara, California; that's more than fifty miles from New York. Er—is that a star? Yes, that's a star—er—Mr. Howard Abston—Dear Howard—"

The pencil was up again and waiting. Morely swallowed and bent over his sheet astonished; he had expected a respite of at least ten or fifteen seconds.

"Well—ah—George Anders, Cowlstown, Ohio," he pursued. "Make it 'Dear Mr. Anders!'"

Faintly, through the closed door, he could catch Darton's voice, which was sailing along with neither hems nor haws; Jimmy was dictating names in there at the rate of three or four to the minute—and Thomas Morely gripped himself and went at his work in earnest.

Page after page he laid aside, turned face downward; he was getting on splendidly. The brown-eyed girl appeared to have stopped automatically at the two hundredth name; she was gone, at any rate, and a girl with disconcertingly bright blue eyes was in her place; and after another considerable space, when the blue-eyed girl had popped from her seat, switched on the lights and vanished, a slim little miss of seventeen or thereabouts, sat before him and took down more names, further names, names without end.

Quite unexpectedly Mr. Morely came to the bottom of the last sheet and awoke from a trance of concentration. The little girl was gone, too, and his work must be over. He stared out of the window and realized that it was dark night now, with a billion little yellow points outlining every big building of down-town New York. The artist soul in him rose to the picture; he was just opening the window for its better contemplation when one of the girls touched his arm and said:

"Mr. Darton would like to see you, if you please, sir."

Jimmy Darton was leaning back in his superb desk chair, smiling wearily but with fanatic enthusiasm undamped; his collar was fastened only by the back button, his necktie, shed somewhere in the heat of dictation, hung over the arm of his chair; his hair was as wild as the whirlpool of papers on the desk before him.

"Sit down, Tom," he said briefly. "I've finished with all the far-off movie people. The girls are sticking the addresses on the night letters now."

"And you're going to send them off to-night?" said Morely, mildly sure that he had grasped one minor detail.

"No, to-morrow night, of course!" Jimmy Darton snapped. "Why the devil should I send them off to-night? I want to get them all written and out of the way before we quit to-night, so that the whole crowd of girls can spend to-morrow ham-

mering out the personal letters that are to go out by mail. To-day is Tuesday. To-morrow will be Wednesday. Well, I want to get every last one out to-morrow night, so that the very first thing Thursday morning the bombshell will burst from Florida to Portland, Oregon!"

"Now just sit still and listen, and if you have anything to suggest, suggest it," the mad fellow hurried on. "This is the night letter each one of them will get and the typewritten personal letter will be essentially the same thing. Ready? 'My dear—' whoever it may be—this is the letter that goes to the movie writers, you know, Tommy. I'll read you the one for the authors after that. Keep your ears open!"

"You are at present employed by a motion picture producer who, for so much a week, hires you to devise photoplay plots which constitute the very foundation of his business. The remuneration for your indispensable work is the most insignificant item among his expenses, yet you are doubtless being made to feel that you are overpaid."

"Your employer will cheerfully spend thousands or hundreds of thousands of dollars on mere properties or settings, he will employ famous directors at a salary greater than that of the President of the United States—yet he will not pay to you, upon whom absolutely everything depends, one-tenth of your rightful share of the money earned for him through your writing. This is, I believe, the most rottenly unjust condition in all industrial America to-day."

"The best part of that first paragraph is that it's pretty nearly true," said Jimmy Darton, with his wild smile. "That doesn't apply to the rest. Listen:

"To remedy this condition, several of our foremost multi-millionaires, each a sincere well-wisher of the film world, each desiring earnestly to see it put upon a sound and just foundation, have combined to contribute a fund of ten million dollars in actual available cash. Their names will be communicated to you at the proper time and will prove more than reassuring. They have organized the American Committee for the Protection of Motion Picture Writers and have placed the writer of this letter, himself an author, in full charge of all operations."

"Our plan is very simple and, with the co-operation of all concerned, will prove absolutely effective. On Saturday, the nine-

teenth of this month, at twelve noon, you are requested to drop work and go out on strike, remaining out until your employer has bonded himself to pay over forty per cent. of his gross profit as the salary of his scenario staff."

"That no hardship may result to the scenario writers of America, the American Committee unqualifiedly binds itself to pay in full the salary of each striking scenario man, payments to be made weekly for the full term of the strike upon presentation of a properly certified claim. An accredited representative of the Committee will be in your city before Tuesday of next week to arrange these certifications, so that full salary payments will be mailed or wired in time to reach you before Saturday, the twenty-sixth."

"It is our full determination to obtain justice for every scenario man in the country, and we shall do this by cutting off completely the producer's supply of photoplays, thus paralyzing his business within a matter of few weeks. Our end can be attained by co-operation and that very swiftly; will you wire at our expense your consent to join the movement or your refusal if you feel warranted in refusing? You will be interested to know that the dramatists and fiction writers of the country are a unit in this movement; they will refuse to write motion picture material or to sell rights in any past, present or future plays or stories until we have won the strike."

"Kindly wire your answer immediately upon receipt of this."

"Well?" questioned Jimmy Darton.

"My Lord!" breathed Morely.

"The letter that goes to the fiction writers is essentially the same idea applied to their own cases," the chairman of the committee continued serenely. "I'm telling them that the regular scenario writers are going out in a body to cut off the supply of plots and gain some kind of square deal. I am demanding that they stop selling any motion picture rights in their stories for less than five thousand dollars a reel until the strike is settled—fixed rate to be agreed upon later by a board of arbitration. Does it sound pretty convincing?"

"It sounds to me like a good long term in Sing Sing for you!" the artist replied. "They'll—they'll never take it seriously."

"Won't they?" chuckled Jimmy Darton. "That just shows how darned little you know about human nature or the writing

temperament, my boy. Another thing: pretty nearly every adaptable brain in the country is working on that sort of stuff now, and a good percentage of them are third-rate. Cut off even the supply from the third-rate ones and what happens? The motion picture industry rips wide open!

"And that's all I'm after!" snarled the infuriated one. "All I want is to cost 'em millions and millions, and I can do it now with a hundred thousand dollars to spend on the job."

"And what happens to any poor fools who do go out on strike?"

Jimmy Darton bit the end from another black cigar and laughed wickedly; he was miles and miles from being his own proper, normal self.

"What happens to any jackass who falls for a glittering swindle?" he asked. "He makes the best of it and knows better next time, of course! I'm sorry if any of them lose their jobs through me; I don't think many will, because the supply's short now; but if they do, they'll have to be sacrificed for the general scheme."

"Jim!"

"And the best of it is that I'm going to hit the mark squarely, because both those lists are up to date. The list of fiction authors I bought for ten dollars from Joe Palmer, the fellow who was trying to get out the literary blue book last summer; he never got away with it, but he did collect the names of everybody, practically, who has sold a story in the last five years.

"That list of scenario writers is my own; I went to some pains to compile it three months ago, when I began to take the devilish game seriously, and it is accurate. Thomas," said Jimmy Darton, and the unpleasant smile cracked his strained countenance, "along about noon of day after to-morrow I believe several people will know that James H. Darton has glued on his war-bonnet!"

"Jimmy, stop this thing now!" pleaded Thomas Morely. "Don't spend thousands of dollars in having that idiotic thing wired all over the country! Give these girls twenty dollars apiece and send them home now, for good; to-morrow I'll see what sort of discount the man will consider in buying back this furniture, and—"

Jimmy Darton's fist landed on his desk.

"You chop that rot, also now and for good, or get out of here!" he snarled. "I

wanted you in this and I depended on you, but if you can't do anything more than whine, the quicker you leave, the better!"

Having a temper of his own, Mr. Morely rose and said: "I'll leave now, then!"

"Don't slam the door on your way out, and tell that peculiarly pretty young person with the blue eyes to come in here and bring five fresh note-books," responded the demented writer, with equal crispness. "Any time you feel like returning, you're welcome!"

Thus it came about that through the long evening Thomas Morely sat alone and browsed darkly on the case of his friend. By bedtime he had found his course; poor Jimmy's nearest relatives were in Indiana; in the morning—always providing that the papers did not tell of Jimmy's arrest or arrival in a hospital—he would look in at 4444 Cirrus Building.

Thus, too, it came about that Jimmy Darton walked his offices until nearly midnight, smoking black cigars, overseeing six weary girls who worked toward the end of their night-letter nightmare. The seven went down together on the one all-night elevator and Jimmy took a taxi to his comfortable little apartment.

He did not even try to sleep. In bathrobe and pajamas he sat by his window and scowled into the black, still night—and the most curious thing was that never a single thought of the American Committee for the Protection of Motion Picture Writers lurked within his seething brain.

Toward three in the morning a great, broken sob escaped him as he gazed at the sky, for vault and stars had faded from his abnormal vision and he saw only a horrid wraith of Sibyl Dane, adorable and adored, floating away and away, the wife of another!

CHAPTER V.

ON THE EVE OF BATTLE.

WEDNESDAY was madness.

Morely, entering fearfully just after nine, found the American Committee in full swing again, with Jimmy Darton in his office, snow-white, cleanly shaven, smoking on through a fresh box of black cigars.

Letterheads had arrived in quantity. Five girls were hammering frantically at them and at the accompanying envelopes; a new, younger girl was folding letters and insert-

ing them as they came, sheaf after sheaf, from Darton's pen, flowingly signed.

In the private office the blue-eyed girl sat with Jimmy Darton and an official of the telegraph company, classifying night letters and arranging for certain special ratings. All was bustle and excitement and the brief unpleasantness of last evening seemed quite forgotten, for in a matter of minutes Thomas Morely found himself with certain lists to check.

Noon shot by and little bales of letters, sealed and stamped, were piling up at last. Mid-afternoon, and a husky messenger boy came in and carried off the bundle of material for the wire; mid-afternoon also brought in one Lawrence Furbush.

This particular Furbush was head of a certain big scenario department in a New Jersey movie concern and his appearance startled Jimmy Darton more than a little. He came to the point instantly:

"Jimmy, is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"The rumor that you're organizing a strike. Don't start like that; that's all I know about it, except that you're guaranteeing to pay the salaries of every one who goes out."

"Tell me which of the girls has been talking and I'll fire her on the spot," Jimmy Darton said quietly.

"I can't tell you, and I wouldn't if I could," grinned Furbush. "It came to me about fifth-hand, everybody along the line sworn to secrecy. I've said nothing about it, but—is it true?"

"It is."

"The salary part of it?"

"We'll pay the salary of every man who goes out on strike, as long as the strike lasts, and we expect to call out every man in the country."

Furbush started.

"Then it is a fact, eh? If I go out, say, I'm to call here for my salary each week?"

Jimmy Darton flicked the ash from his cigar.

"How much do you get, Larry?" he asked. "It's confidential, you know."

"Two hundred."

"The thing can't last over three weeks; I have no idea of its lasting one," smiled Jimmy Darton, fishing unconcernedly into his side pocket. "We'll call it three, however, and you can hand me back the balance when the show's over—and remember

to do it, because I have to account for every penny.

"Make a note, Miss Daymore: Lawrence Furbush, six hundred dollars. Write a receipt, please, too, and Mr. Furbush will sign it—six hundred dollars, in full payment of three weeks salary in advance. There's the six hundred, Larry."

Gasping, the scenario man acquired it, and then leaned forward and laid a fond hand on Darton's knee as he said:

"And now, tell me all about it, old man, and I'll be with you heart and soul. This thing has been due for a year or more, and I'm glad and proud to be in it at the start."

Again Jimmy Darton smiled.

"To-morrow morning, first mail, you will get an explanatory letter, Larry," said he. "Before noon Saturday, or before Saturday night, anyway, I hope to give you and every one else full particulars. Until then you will have to trust me and trust the looks of things around here, my boy, for the full truth isn't ready to break yet. I will say confidentially, though, that every man who keeps out of it might as well resign from the movie line for good—but don't repeat it."

Mr. Furbush glanced at his watch, reflected that the scenario force quit at five and that it took time to return to Jersey, and rose quickly.

"I'll never breathe a word, Jim, and I'll help you to the finish!" he said, as he scribbled his name on the receipt. "Bye-bye! See you to-morrow."

With unruffled, uncanny, calm, Jimmy Darton returned to the signing of letters.

At six Morely, exhausted, made ready to leave and pleaded hard with Jimmy to quit for the day before he dropped. He received nothing better than an impatient smile and a request to turn up again in the morning—and Darton went on signing.

At ten the interesting septet descended again in the all-night car, six young women thoroughly tired out, one glassy-eyed writer of fiction to wander into the darkness, think bitterly on a corner, hail a taxi at last and sit through most of the night at one of the silliest cabarets on earth.

At four in the morning he drifted into his rooms, rigid and white, bathed mechanically, ordered a pot of black coffee and watched the sunrise. In the rosy pink of the east floated a maddening, misty picture of one whose name had been Sibyl Dane.

(To Be Continued.)

Three Drives



by George Foxhall

SEVEN HUNDRED AND FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS a year, even with the income-tax and the high cost of opera seats taken into consideration, is a great little aid to self-confidence. Rarely does a man thus equipped have reason to doubt his perfect fitness—if he keeps clear of politics—for any destiny his complacent mind may decide upon as worthy of him.

Melvin D. Munster had seven hundred and fifty thousand a year; he had kept clear of politics; he had a complacent mind; and his complacent mind had selected a destiny which he admitted to be worthy of him.

To do him justice, Melvin did give considerable thought to the question of whether or not he was worthy of the destiny, but try as he would he could find no weak spot in his armor. He was—as he appraised himself—reasonably bright, remarkably healthy, normally good-looking, well educated without being high-brow, and in complete control of an income of seven hundred and fifty thousand dollars a year.

The destiny that Melvin had decided that he was so completely endowed for was that of being the husband of Miss Susan Trusdell, a lady whose singular beauty was merely one asset of many in a personality as bewitching as spring, and a good deal more dependable.

Her income, while less formidable as a recital of round figures than that of Mr. Munster, was, perhaps, equally productive of serenity of mind. Even with an extravagant aunt to support as chaperon one does not grieve over the increasing cost of seal-

skin when the years are just one succession of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars after another.

Melvin had decided upon this particular destiny for some time before he came to the point of taking Miss Trusdell into his confidence, for in spite of his convictions regarding his fitness Melvin had a streak of shyness which he found embarrassingly assertive whenever he tried to mention the subject. But at last he did mention it. Curiously enough it was at a time when neither of them was expecting it.

He had called for her to go out with him in his car. She came down clothed in the conventional motoring garb.

"All right?" she asked, airily.

"I should say so," he answered with sudden enthusiasm.

He had seen her in that motoring costume, or one like it, a hundred times, but it had never occurred to him, as it did now, that whereas a motoring costume usually concealed its wearer's charms, her charms thus clothed simply leaped at one more tantalizingly.

"I should say so," he exclaimed, and seized her hands and looked at her with such frank admiration that she blushed.

The situation was so unusual that for a second she was non-plused, and in that second he had made the leap.

"We have known each other for a good many years, Susie," he said.

"Of course we have, you foolish man," she answered, trying to speak lightly, but angrily discovering that there was a strain of nervousness in her laugh. "Roughly

speaking about as many years as we have lived."

"I am quite sure that it's longer than that that I have loved you," he went on, suddenly eloquent. "Will you—"

The telephone bell saved the day for her. She snatched her hands free and ran to answer it.

"Hello! Oh, how are you, Frank? Yes, I shall be home this evening. Half-past eight? That'll be all right. Yes, of course, I shall be *very* glad to see you. Just going out for a ride with Mel Munster. Why—why he hasn't said so. All right. I'll tell him. Good-by, Frank."

"He says you're a lucky dog to have the leisure to take me riding," she said, turning to Munster with recovered poise.

"Of course I am," he admitted. "What did he ask when you answered that I hadn't said so?"

"He asked if you were going to be here to-night," she replied, with exaggerated nonchalance.

"Oh! Well, I am."

She faced him a moment and his eyes faltered.

"That wouldn't be nice," she said. "He doesn't want you."

"Of course he doesn't," he growled. "The point is, do you?"

"No! I think we'd better start now, Mel, before we quarrel."

"I beg your pardon," he said, and held the door open for her, smiling; but he did not know that as she answered his smile and flashed a momentary glance at him as she passed, that into her mind came a single word.

"Thoroughbred!"

He chatted casually about tires and ignition and new cars, golf, polo, and the latest exhibition in a fashionable art gallery, as they slipped through the Park and up Seventh Avenue. She tried to be as casual as he, but she was wondering what she would say to him when he finished asking that interrupted question, as he inevitably would.

Or rather, she was wondering how she would give him the answer she already knew. As for Melvin, beneath his trivial chatter he was reproaching himself as an ass for trying to propose at such an idiotic moment.

"What girl," he asked himself wisely, wants to be proposed to while she is wearing a motor-veil?"

His moment's disquietude about Frank

Marshall had long since vanished. Marshall was a poor man, holding a fairly responsible position in a great engineering firm and receiving a salary of perhaps five or six thousand a year. Obviously, Melvin thought, his jealousy had been ridiculous.

Susie and Marshall's sister had been class-mates at Bryn Mawr. Naturally her friend's brother and she had struck up a kind of acquaintanceship, and he himself must admit that he found Marshall a mighty likable fellow, but—

"What are you laughing at?" Susie asked.

They were gliding over the glass-like surface of Pelham Parkway, somewhat faster than the law allows.

"I was thinking," he answered, "that you must think I'm an ass."

"Would that be so very amusing?"

"If the thought were only momentary. May I come to see you to-morrow evening?"

"Certainly!"

"And by that time do you think you will have forgiven my—my rudeness of this afternoon?"

She looked at him and smiled bewitchingly.

"I think it's rather nice to have one's old friends rude once in a while," she said, "so long as it is only momentary."

He laughed, and the car swallowed half a mile of polished roadway in twenty-five seconds of delirium.

The next night Munster was covering the same strip of roadway at approximately the same speed, but the vicious jerk that opened the throttle and the frowning face that glared over the wheel showed a quite different impulse from that which had sent the car on that earlier joyous madness.

At eight-thirty Melvin had ridden up to the Trusdell mansion, decorously clothed in evening attire and decorously driven by his chauffeur. He found Susie in the drawing-room, her beauty even more provocative than it had been from that strangely stimulating concealment of motoring costume.

"Auntie will be here very soon," she told him as she shook hands.

"Is that supposed to relieve my mind?" he asked.

She laughed. He went on suddenly.

"I didn't come to see your aunt, and I don't think it would be any nicer for you to let her interfere with my visit than it would have been for me to interfere with Marshall's visit last night. Do you?"

This was a little too direct. Susie found herself becoming decidedly nervous.

"I don't know what you mean, Mel?" she said. "Auntie said she would try to come down before you go. She—she is lying down with a headache."

"Thank you! Susie, I'm not very eloquent. I'm in love with you. You know me. As you say, you have known me all your life. Will you marry me?"

This, also, was very direct, and very brief. Susie had pictured herself as being very gentle and considerate, but this self-possessed brevity gave her no room to arrange her kind speeches. It was very disconcerting, and made her nervous and cross.

"I don't see why a man has to propose to a woman simply because she has known him all her life," she said.

"I beg your pardon. Did I give you the impression that that was my reason for proposing? It isn't, of course. I'm proposing to you because I feel something very wonderful about you; because I love you very much, and because I think that our temperaments and our social position make us remarkably suited for each other."

"I don't see what our social position has to do with it—if you mean by that the fact that we are both wealthy."

"I think it has some importance. Don't you?"

"Not at all! I don't see that the possession of a great deal of money makes a man better as a human being, or a husband. In fact, I think it's more likely to spoil him."

He smiled.

"We seem to be drifting from the point," he observed gently. "The question I asked is not a hypothetical one. I think I'm not a very skilful debater. Quite apart from the question of my being very wealthy, then, will you be my wife?"

"That's the trouble, Mel," she answered. "I can't think of you apart from the fact of your being very wealthy. You've never had an activity that wasn't directly the outcome of your wealth. In other words, you have never had a real activity at all. The only impression you have ever made on my mind is that of an animated bank-book with a sense of humor."

"Don't tell me that you don't love me because I don't 'do something,' as the story-books say. The heroine is always wanting the rich hero to 'do something.'"

"I know it sounds a bit banal, but I sup-

pose that, indirectly, is really what I mean. That is, I'm not inviting you to do something, because I don't know that anything you could do would make any difference to me, but I think most women feel that a man who has never done anything or had any other purpose than spending money will be very little comfort in trouble and will be mighty dull company after a few years. Personally I must say that a man who is in the swim of things appeals to me. He acquires decision and force and a strength a woman can look up to."

"May I ask if Frank Marshall seems to meet these requirements of yours more nearly than I do?"

"He certainly does come nearer than you do, Mel."

"Does he, in fact, quite meet them?"

"I don't know," she answered whimsically. "That is what Frank asked me himself last night."

"He proposed to you?"

"Yes."

"Well, it's a free country. I gather that you didn't accept him."

"No."

"Nor refuse him?"

"No."

"Huh! He has at least that advantage of me, then."

"Has he?"

He looked up swiftly. "Hasn't he?"

"You seem to be in as great a hurry to be refused as you were to be accepted," she retorted.

"It amounts to the same thing, doesn't it?" he replied. "You speak of his advantages of character and the only advantage that I have over him seems to be money, which I realize is quite immaterial to you. Well, he's the only poor man I could see win you and not believe that he's after your money. I must admit that I believe Marshall's quite too big a man for that."

And again through Susie's mind flashed the one word:

"Thoroughbred!"

"But after all," he went on, "Marshall earns his living because he has to earn it. I don't. He holds down a job that somebody else's enterprise has created. He does things that are laid out for him and he does them according to standard formula. I never heard of his doing anything very striking or individual. It's all based on other people's experience."

"And what have you done, Mel?"

He was silent.

"You're trying to show," she went on, "that Frank hasn't done anything to stir my imagination. Well, he's part of the world's work, and I think that touches my imagination. He's in a position to do something; at any rate to be interesting. But when I ask you what you have done there isn't any answer."

"Yes, there is, too," he retorted with a touch of boyish awkwardness, "but a man hates to talk about himself, especially when it really doesn't seem important to what you call the world's work, but a man has to have caliber to do it, anyhow."

"What?"

"Well, everybody thought I'd be picked to play on the International Polo Team. You know I broke my ankle in practice. All the newspapers said that if I'd been playing we might have held the cup. Perhaps it's nothing, but there are less than ten men in the world who could have occupied that position—and the experts said that I was the best of the ten."

"But don't you see, Mel, that's part of your bank-book, too? It's a mere game, and a game only for the very rich. I like to watch polo, but it doesn't stir me any more than a close game of tennis, and," she finished with a little gentle laugh, "Frank plays better tennis than you do."

"Don't let's talk about it any more, Mel. You're a nice, cozy friend, and have been ever since we used to roller-skate in Central Park together, but as a husband—well, as I said, you don't touch my imagination. Do you think you can take me riding to-morrow?"

"I'm really sorry," he answered. "I promised to start training to-morrow to play for the All Stars against All America on the fifteenth, and my ponies are all on edge for the work-out. Do you mind? Of course you know it hasn't anything to do with—with this?"

"Of course I know. Frank asked me to let him drive me to the game in his new car. He thinks you're the greatest No. 3 player in the world."

"I suppose he read it in the papers," Mel growled ungraciously. "I'll look for you at the game, then. Good-night!"

"Good-night! I hope you'll win," she answered. "I really do think I'd rather watch polo than tennis."

So that was why, an hour later, having

changed his clothes and driven his fast run-about with moody slowness as far as Pelham Parkway, Munster suddenly snapped open the throttle and shot over a half mile of that glittering surface in a burst of savage speed.

"Tennis!" he growled as he chained the car into low speed and turned toward home. "It takes nerve to play polo, as well as money. I'd like to see some of her virtuously poor heroes try it."

Which, as the saying goes, was "naming no names."

"Good Lord!" he ruminated further. "I can't help being rich, and it's a cinch that Marshall can't help being poor or he wouldn't be poor. For two pins I'd buy his blessed engineering firm and give it to him and then see if she'd turn him down."

"Gee whiz! She's rich, too. Yet she doesn't seem to think that's such an awful crime. What's the use of being rich, anyhow? It's supposed to get you everything you want, but it doesn't get me what I want. It didn't even keep me from breaking my ankle when I wanted to play on the International Team. Snapped just like a poor man's! Hang it!"

Next day, his usual cheerful and complacently well bred manner obscured by what in a poor man might have been called bad temper, he went down to Lark Springs and began the grind of training for the big game. His friends and fellow players found it very hard to understand Melvin during the next two weeks, and his listless play several times put him in danger of losing his place on the team, but just when it seemed as if a change would have to be made he would whirl his pony like a demon into the middle of a *mêlée* and take the ball with a skill and power that was irresistible, or, as if instructed by wizardry, he would race madly for some spot in the field just in time to intercept the white sphere with a marvelous back-hand stroke as he rode at full speed, preventing an opposing goal or scoring one for his team.

At such times it seemed as if nothing on earth could defeat his individual brilliance. During the last three days he settled down to team play, and the minds of the committee became wells of calm content.

At last came the fifteenth. Whatever may be said of polo as a rich players' game it is too fascinating as a spectacle to be exclusively a rich spectators' game, and early in the day the stands were crowded to

capacity and automobiles were beginning to line all the permissible spaces around the field.

Long before the game started there was plenty to be seen. Players were starting in to warm up the mounts they would use, or riding hard for the practice on mounts they would not use.

Melvin was pacing Anita, his favorite pony, around the field at an easy canter when he was attracted by the frantic wavings of a party in an automobile. They were Susie, her aunt, and Marshall. He rode up to them.

"Good luck to you, old boy," cried Marshall, leaning over to shake his hand. "No broken ankle to rob us of your play this time."

"Thanks, old man! Pretty looking car! How does she run?"

Marshall made a comical face.

"The engine keeps running and the wheels keep turning," he laughed, "but between you and me she rattles like a distracted biscuit-box and I'm afraid her engine will jump through her hood some day. But I'm a poor man and it's something to have a vehicle that moves without being pushed and it's the best I can do."

Melvin laughed.

"I wish I could be rich with as graceful an ease as you are poor," he said. "I wouldn't mind if I had to drive a Ford."

"I think you are rich so gracefully that it would be a great shame for you to be poor," observed Susie with a demure smile.

He bowed over his pony's neck, then made her rear and spin around on her hind feet in that impossible way that only polo ponies seem capable of, coming down on all fours in front of Susie as if she, also, were bowing to the lady.

As he rode away it occurred to Melvin that the silly banter had driven from his mind the more serious idea that had first possessed it. The line of automobiles was, in his judgment, much too close to the playing-field, but the ground committee had over-ruled his objection, or, rather, had pooh-poohed his suggestion to have them lined up fifteen feet farther back.

They argued that instead of three lines of spectators in front of the cars the change would simply mean added lines of them and be just as dangerous.

At any rate it was too late to do anything about it now. He was being called into position. A scrub team was going to

give the regulars a little exhibition warm-up.

He was annoyed that he had wasted the minutes. He had not wanted to use Anita in this mix-up, but as they were about to start there was hardly time to change ponies. Well, he would ride her easily and play well back until he had an opportunity to make a change.

"What on earth!" he exclaimed as he looked down the field. "Is that insane idiot Turner going to insist on pushing that fifteen hand demon through our polo ponies. I've told him a dozen times that's no kind of a brute to play polo. Hey! Listen, Parsons! Turner shouldn't bring that black devil on to the field. He's not strong enough to hold him and the beast goes crazy the minute he rubs shoulders."

He had ridden back to the stand to speak to the chairman of the committee. The ball was already in play and the ponies mixing.

"It's all right, Mel," shouted Parsons. "Gaspard's up on him. He'll ride him easy and it's only one chukka. He'll—Good Heaven! There he goes!"

Gaspard, it seemed, was not to have complete say on the matter of easy riding. The minute a pony grazed his flank the black horse climbed into the air and then plunged forward, to be reared again by Gaspard's iron grip on the bridle. And then the unexpected happened.

The bridle broke, just as a pony shot forward in the direction of the black. They came together with a sickening shock, all the black's restrained strength suddenly released by the snapping rein.

Gaspard was thrown violently backward by the released tension and the sudden forward plunge. Pierce, on the pony, swung his leg over and found himself hurled beyond the rolling bodies. The animals crashed and rolled over and over in a pounding, squealing medley of flying hoofs and biting jaws. They were suddenly fight mad.

Then they rolled apart. The pony remained down, trying pitifully to rise. The black leaped to his feet, raging, and started full speed across the field.

He was obviously blind with madness. Riders tried to snatch at the broken rein vainly. They hardly knew, in the heat of the play, what had happened, and were quite unprepared for tragedy.

The black was making straight for the line of automobiles. The people in front

of the cars had scattered. In his direct path was a blue car of flimsy make. The occupants were sitting as if unconscious of danger or hypnotized by it. If he crashed into that car he would undoubtedly smash it or overturn it and trample the occupants beneath those mighty hoofs.

And then was seen another flying figure racing diagonally down the field, riding as if he were possessed, his pony's ears back, her eyeballs of shining white. 'Well she knew when her master wanted to ride like a demon and her to run like a flame.

His voice was in her ears, praying, caressing, shrieking. He was yelling, "Jump out of the car," but she did not know that. It was his voice, whom she loved, calling on her for every ounce and breath that was in her, and she was giving it.

The people in the car were all too paralyzed by the sight of the rushing brute to heed the cry. How he thanked God for Anita's swallow-like speed as she flew onward.

It all took about six seconds, or less. With a swift pressure from his left wrist he gave the flying mare a slight turn and she hurled her slight shoulders against the massive one of the rushing black.

He went over as if he had been shot.

Anita, hurled a pace or two on her feet, went down also, Melvin under her. Splendid animal that she was, as soon as she struck the ground she gathered her strength for resisting the momentum and lay still, waiting for her master's signal, but before recovering rolled half over on her back.

For a moment there was silence, then, "Good old girl! Get up!" and gingerly she got to her feet.

Melvin got to his feet also, pulling himself up by a stirrup leather. The crowd was a pandemonium of cheers as he rose. They began to surge around him. He leaned on Anita's saddle. From the car he had saved ran a woman, followed by a man.

She pushed her way through the crowd and her heart almost stopped beating at the paleness of his face. Her arms went around him as his eyes closed with the agony, and her warm lips pressed upon his white, cold ones.

"Where are you hurt, dear?" she asked, and when he did not answer, but fell limply forward on her shoulder, she whispered:

"I love you!"

He braced himself against Anita and looked up into the face of his lady, smiling.

"I guess I've broken that fool ankle again," he said. "But I don't care."

WORKING IN VACATION

DROWSY afternoons of summer,
What a spell your sunshine throws!
Here I've come to do some good work,
And I doze—doze—doze!

I have hastened from the city,
Thinking here no time I'll lose,
So I make all snug and comfy,
Then I snooze—snooze—snooze!

In the city, loud distraction
For real work no chance allows;
In the country—quick, my paper,
Pen, and—drowse—drowse—drowse!

If I close my eyes a moment
To arrange my mental lumber,
Just as I begin my thinking,
I'm in slumber—slumber—slumber!

I arouse me of a sudden—
Dulness shall not o'er me creep!
I must work now—here! get busy!
Then—I sleep—sleep—sleep!

George Jay Smith.

From Dusk to Dark



by George M.A. Cain

Author of "Four Speeds for Forest Hill," etc.

A THREE-PART STORY—PART TWO.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

MORRIS BALLARD, motoring with Helen Rainsford, stops at a rather forlorn-looking house to get a match with which to light his lamps. He does not come back, and Helen can find no trace of him. What happens is that when the door is opened two men attack him, one of whom Ballard fells. He lies still, and to protect him from the consequences of the murder, the other two hurry Ballard away in a motor-boat. One of these men turns out to be David Brink, the copper king, who takes his quasi-prisoner to his luxurious home on the banks of the Hudson, where he is permitted to phone Helen, but not allowed to tell her where he is.

CHAPTER VII.

AN AMAZING PROPOSITION.

FOR five minutes after Colonel David Brink had reentered the room he engaged in a stern repetition of his intentions to see his plans through, emphasizing again and again that he really meant exactly what he said when he expressed the purpose to have Morris prosecuted for murder if any attempt on Ballard's part should threaten to thwart or hinder his plans.

Then having mentioned that Morris had forfeited his telephone, and that every possible exit from the house would be watched for any attempt to escape, the mining baron dropped the personal for more pleasant subjects. In the space of five seconds more he had become again a charming host, so charming that it seemed hard to believe he could have been anything else.

The dinner was simple, and simply perfect. There were cigars and cigarettes, such cigars and cigarettes as are not on the open market, each bearing Brink's monogram on paper or gilded ribbon. The rich man seemed bent upon making his forced guest as completely at ease as possible.

Long after they had finished eating he sat telling stories and discussing current events with an inside knowledge that made them intensely interesting, displaying a familiarity with all sorts of nooks and corners of the earth quite astounding to one whose life had been necessarily circumscribed.

And he succeeded admirably in his purpose. No higher compliment could have been paid such efforts than, Morris realized afterward, that he had given by revealing most of the history of his own life, including confiding his disappointment over Helen's attitude toward him in response to a query as to whether he were engaged or married.

Yet now and then Brink seemed to forget what he was saying, to lose what was being said to him. The times became more frequent as the night wore on. Lines of care drew deeper around the gray eyes. He started at slight sounds or at the entrance of Horton with some fresh service.

Even in the subdued light the man servant had arranged for the little dinner Brink's face showed a loss of color. He ceased to look young for fifty, came to look old for the sixty he was.

His large, powerful-looking hands grew

tremulous as he manipulated his cigar. He betrayed no signs of intoxication. Somehow, though, Morris got the impression that the man checked an impulse to drink more than he actually consumed.

The strong man's mask was breaking down under some inward strain. Morris actually found himself sympathizing with his captor.

A little clock in the bedroom struck once for the half hour after one. Brink all but leaped to his feet at the sound. He dropped back breathing heavily, hastily poured himself a drink of the Scotch whisky Horton had set beside him and swallowed it clear.

An instant later there was a tinkling in a little closet in the wall of the den. Brink got up slowly, with a short sigh that came very near to being a groan, the last vestige of color gone from his cheeks.

He swayed, not drunkenly, but weakly, as he crossed the room. Inside the closet was a second telephone.

"Mr. Van Cleef—yes—tell him I'll be waiting for him in fifteen minutes—in the library down-stairs. Shut this off again, Wilmot," was all of the conversation Morris got—all there was at that end of the wire.

But the great financier dropped the receiver to the length of the wire in an attempt that failed to place it on its hook. He sank into the nearest of the chairs. He wiped perspiration from his chalk-white forehead. From his lips escaped a groan:

"Oh, my God! He's done it!"

For a little Brink seemed oblivious to Morris's presence. His teeth ground audibly. Then the heavily-boned hands that had fallen limp on the arms of the chair, clutched convulsively at the posts as he got himself once more to his feet. Standing, the man shook clenched fists.

He muttered thick curses—the coarse, hard, heavy cursing of men of vast plains and mountains awful in their sublime heights, a language as utterly foreign as could be imagined to the suave, urbane patter in which he had a moment before been chatting with Morris.

Quite suddenly he recovered himself sufficiently to speak to Ballard with some return to his former manner:

"Pardon me for getting excited," he said. "And for leaving you now. Ask Horton for anything you need during the night. I wish you the best of sleep and pleasantest of dreams."

He stepped from the door before Morris could reply.

It was long before Ballard got to sleep that night; so long that the Palisades were drawing a darker line against the graying sky.

For another hour then he dozed fitfully. Each time he lost consciousness of the strange room and bed, he found himself dreaming again through the horrible moment of the previous evening, fighting to free himself from the grasp of a man in the dark, or being forced to touch a deep, blue scar on the temple of a corpse.

Just when he had made up his mind that he would never allow himself to sleep again and to face the ghastly repetitions of the dream, he dropped into a deeper slumber.

It seemed to him that this was but another doze. He awoke again from a different dream. He was in a court-room, before a judge and jury and a lawyer and a crowd. Two men stood up and pointed big, heavy fingers at him and spoke the single word—"Murderer!" He thought that Helen came and stood beside him to try to drown out that word with her sweet voice.

But the men's voices grew louder and louder, until the sound of them was as thunder roaring through the room, until it was taken up by the jurors one at a time, then by the judge whose tremendous tones rumbled forth the sound of doom—

"To die in the electric chair at the rising of to-morrow's sun."

Morris knew little of court proceedings and evidently knew less in a dream. He awoke, sitting straight up in bed.

Before him the open window showed a sky of purple black, which was almost instantly riven by a sharp flash of lightning. He understood the cause of the dream now.

But he could not get away from the depression it had wrought upon him. Electric storms had always played upon his nerves. Dream and storm together did more than all Colonel David Brink's warnings had done to bring home to him that he was not so secure from punishment for murder as he might wish.

"Beg pardon, sir, will you have your bath hot or cold, sir?"

The deferential Horton was at hand before Morris's feet had touched the floor beside the bed, or his eyes had picked out in the storm-darkness the soft robe laid ready for his donning.

"What time is it, Horton?" Ballard

asked, managing with difficulty to keep his teeth from chattering, though the room was quite warm.

"'Alf after eleven, sir. Colonel Brink gave horders that you were not to be disturbed, sir. Also 'e sends 'is apologies that 'e must be away until late this afternoon, but 'opes to return for the pleasure of dining with you and Miss Brink, sir."

Then, observing the distraughtness still left by the dream on Morris's face, the fellow suggested:

"Maybe you'd not be wishing to get up yet, sir. I'll 'ave the coffee 'ere and breakfast in a jiffy, if you wish. And Colonel Brink gave orders you should 'ave all the papers, sir. They're so big, sir, that I didn't wish to be bringing them to your bed if you didn't wish it, sir."

Morris's intention to get up vanished. The papers he wanted worse than any coffee or breakfast or bath or anything else in the world.

They would tell how far the police had got with the discovery of the murder last night; what they knew, or at least were ready to publish as to any possible clues. He bade Horton bring them in.

Brink had certainly been thoughtful. Morris's eye lit first upon the Newark *Sunday Call*. He seized it and began to scan the headlines of the first page of the news section.

Surprised at finding no line at the top which could connect with the slaying, he glanced down the columns. War news, political gossip, notice of a prominent man's death of heart failure, two stories of small burglaries—the page held no heading that could bear upon any murder story.

He turned the page. The haste of search had given place to disgusted belief that the paper cared so little to keep up with the news as to have refused to open space for what had happened at least four hours before the single edition of the news section was run off the presses.

Then he found this half way down the second column:

YOUNG CIVIL ENGINEER AMNESIA VICTIM.

Telephone Messages Clear up Promised Mystery in Old Kearney Ruin.

Considerable excitement was aroused early last evening when Miss Helen Rainsford, of East Orange, got several of the employees of

the Mapes Coal Yards to come to her aid in searching for Mr. Morris Ballard, who had been motoring with her along Passaic avenue, just opposite Woodside station. In her excitement Miss Rainsford told a startling story of having seen a light in the old Brink home-stand, which had caused young Ballard to go to the house for matches with which to light the lamps of the car. Ballard did not come back, and the light disappeared.

Meanwhile Mr. Ballard had been picked up from the street some distance away, in a condition of temporary amnesia, and taken to a near-by sanatorium. There he recovered enough to remember where he had left the young lady and to telephone her parents, who promptly set out for the spot in a taxicab.

Since a search of the deserted building revealed no signs of recent occupancy, the police think the young people saw the reflection of some light in the windows. Mr. Ballard's nerves have been run down somewhat for several weeks, and the surprise of finding the house empty is thought to have shocked his memory away for the time.

Though his whereabouts is being kept secret, it is reported that he is entirely in possession of his memory again, and on the road to speedy recovery.

Mr. Ballard is a Civil Engineer in the employ of the Gainville Construction Company. He is a bachelor, having rooms at 135 Grove Avenue, East Orange.

That was all. It was exactly that much more than was mentioned in any of the New York papers. Morris Ballard felt a distinct sense of disappointment.

The very absence of more seemed sinister. He felt that he wished the body of the slain man had been discovered. Until that had happened and the police had announced some definite theory, the dread of being connected with it would remain.

"The *Evening Telegram* is just come, sir," Horton announced at the door, holding up the pink sheet that is New York's one Sunday afternoon publication.

Morris began to search its columns. He had but glanced at the long war headlines before his eye caught a black-faced announcement under the larger type of the news from Europe.

VAN CLEEF-BRINK ENGAGEMENT OFF

Society suffers a keen disappointment in learning of the breaking off of the engagement between Howard Bainbridge Van Cleef, the well-known real-estate operator and clubman, and Miss Florence Brink, daughter of Colonel David Brink, the multi-millionaire copper-mine owner and financier. It was understood that the two young people were very much in love with each other, and their friends looked forward to a wedding next fall that should be a social event.

Both Mr. Van Cleef and Colonel Brink declined to discuss the affair beyond confirming the news of the disruption. Miss Brink is said to have started an extended cruise in her father's yacht, the *Vandal*, though this is denied by her father.

Unless former rumors have been sadly awry, this is the fourth engagement Miss Brink has broken in the past three years. Just after her debut, it was generally reported that she was engaged to Herbert Matthewson, the horseman and polo-player. This was soon denied, and the friendship seemed to have waned. Later, in 1913, stories had her betrothed to Earl Kingsbridge, of England, who was then visiting in New York. No denial was forthcoming for a week, but it was strong enough when it did come from both sides.

Last year—

As Morris got to this point Horton brought the coffee. Morris finished the paragraph, which merely added another name to the list of those which had been linked and then suddenly disjoined from that of Colonel Brink's daughter. The story, carefully written so as to skirt any danger of libel suits, might have conveyed only the idea that Miss Brink was a most fickle-minded young lady.

Somehow, as he recalled the father's strange actions centering about Van Cleef's call last evening, Ballard found in these broken engagements some sign of a more sinister significance.

But he looked on through the paper for news which might seem more closely to relate to his own affairs. There was none.

Morris got up, allowed Horton to shave him and trim his hair, bathed, dressed deliberately, dawdling over what seemed the only thing he was likely to have to do until such time as Brink might conclude to set him free. But his brain was working swiftly.

Plainly no murder had been discovered. Apparently no one was looking for any. Murders are too good news to escape the papers for a whole night, unless they have escaped every one else but the perpetrators.

Even the disappearance of an unimportant young engineer would be news enough to get some notice in New York, had it not seemed that all mystery in the matter was solved. If any one was interested in searching for him, not enough interest had been aroused in others to get the matter before public attention at all.

The significance of all this was clear. There was not a reason in the world why he should not return to his normal mode of life, pass off the unexplained details with

some further elaboration of the amnesia story, and let the matter be forgotten.

Morris became quite excited about this hopeful view of the situation. He wondered why Brink had not already given instructions for his being permitted to depart. Certainly Brink need fear no revelations from Morris, once his liberty had been gained without revelations. For, no matter how unintentional his part in the slaying of the man called Frank, he would hardly wish to be the one to start the investigation that might turn dangerously against him.

He could not believe that Brink had any interest in detaining him other than that of preserving silence. Brink must know that he had been attacked and was not the one who had done the attacking. And a man does not spend a whole evening trying to make comfortable one whom he takes for the murderer of a friend or even a servant.

He grew impatient to see the millionaire, to explain what Brink must fail to see, since he continued to hold him. Finally he called Horton, and bade him ask Mr. Brink to come to the room on a matter of importance.

"Colonel Brink is not at 'ome, sir," Horton replied. "'E'll be back at six or thereabouts."

There seemed nothing to do but to believe the man, who was probably speaking the truth. Morris paced the floor for an hour. Then Horton came in of his own accord. It was nearly two o'clock.

"Miss Brink presents her compliments, sir, and her regrets that headache will prevent her dining with you, sir. And will you have your dinner 'ere, or below, sir?"

"I'll eat down-stairs," Morris instantly replied.

Sheer impatience of a confinement, which was the more irksome because it should already have ended, prompted the desire.

"You'll be quite alone, sir," Horton mentioned.

Whereupon Morris changed his mind. Dining alone in such a room as might be the general eating place in such a house could only be uncomfortable. That he could have the privilege if he wished it ended the wish for it.

"Very well, I'll eat here," he decided. And he dawdled through another exquisite dinner. He managed to drag the last of the coffee over until four o'clock.

Then he forced himself to take a walk on the porch, tried to grow interested in the

distant view of the Hudson, of the boats that steamed up and down, of the signs of human habitation that dotted the Palisades opposite, of the motors that ran in a thin but unending stream to and fro on the wide boulevard at the bottom of the steep declivity which Brink's house crowned.

Then he came back and got out a book. He fingered a dozen before he chose a volume by the best-known of all detective story writers, Conan Doyle. He found a tale dealing with a murder.

"'Ere's a later edition of the *Telegram*, sir," announced Horton just when Morris had got to the climax preceding the thrilling dénouement.

And Ballard dropped the story right there without another thought for the characters or the incidents that had failed utterly to engage any of his attention.

The outside page of the later edition contained no mention of any mystery in Kearney, Newark, or the Oranges. He had just ascertained that the inner pages were exactly the same as in the earlier edition he had already read, when—

"Colonel Brink is 'ome, sir. 'E'll be right up in a moment, sir, if you still wish to see him," Horton announced.

"I certainly do," Ballard cried, springing from his chair in sheer excitement.

"You do, eh?" came in the voice of his host, who had followed on Horton's heels. "Well, I want very much to see you."

At another time Morris would have waited deferentially to hear the other first. Now he could not wait. He hastily stated his reasons for believing he should be set at liberty.

Brink heard him through to the end. Then he startled Morris by looking sharply into his eyes and saying severely:

"You mean, I should turn loose a murderer simply because I'm the only one who knows of the murder!"

For an instant Morris was nonplused by this unexpected attitude. Then he gathered his wits.

"You don't believe that I am a murderer. You know, as well as I do, that I was attacked without provocation, that I struck instinctively, that the death was the sheerest accident of a justifiable defense on my part."

Ballard spoke slowly, returning the other's gaze, eye for eye.

"I know nothing of the kind," snapped Brink. "And I do know that the instant I

wish to do so I can have all the police in America looking for you. I know where that body is, if others don't as yet."

Morris dropped weakly into a chair. Then he got up again, a wave of fury rushing over him as he thought of the part this man was playing against him.

"Don't be violent," commanded Brink coolly. "I'm too much bigger than you are, and I'm armed."

"You're a damned scoundrel," cried Ballard through clenched teeth; "you're deliberately persecuting me, deliberately threatening my life to save yourself from punishment for some of your infernal machinations."

Brink smiled calmly.

"We'll let it go at that for the present, if you say so. I hold the cards; I have my own reasons for playing them. But I have a proposition to make to you which may give the iron boot a silken lining to say the least."

"To pad the cell, eh?" Morris retorted in sullen rage. "You're doing what you can to make me need a padded cell."

"Would you need a padded cell if you found yourself placed at the head of a million-dollar concern—a constructing company, say—and compelled to live and move as a member of the best society in America?"

Morris's answer was a bitter little laugh of incredulity, without a trace of interest.

"My plan for you is that you are to form a big company. Also you will be introduced to the best families in this town. You are to make yourself as popular as you can. As soon as possible you are to win and marry my daughter."

CHAPTER VIII.

LUXURY'S OWN PET.

COLONEL BRINK paused to let his amazing words sink in. Morris stared in all the amaze the proposition might have been expected to produce.

The thing was more than amazing; it was absurd. Morris found himself struggling to control a sudden burst of more than half hysterical laughter.

"Colonel," he said with a suppressed heaving of his shoulders, "have you that padded cell handy? I think I'm ready for it. Or hadn't we better have two of them?"

He spoke to give excuse for laughter. Excused, the laughter did not come. He suddenly thought that he had hit upon a truth which was not laughable. The man before him was mad—and a man of tremendous muscle and frame.

Brink resumed:

"You are without living ties."

"Oh, yes," Morris agreed.

"You have a good education, fair conversational abilities, better manners than a lot of men of wealth have ever exhibited in my presence. You can carry out the part."

"No doubt society will fall over itself to claim me on sight," Morris jeered.

He could not get his overwrought nerves entirely away from the absurdity of the thing.

"It will. A single man, free of possibly undesirable connections, with plenty of money and not impossible manners, can get in without an effort. Society is made up of women. Women are never jealous of men. They need all the rich men they can get. You'll do."

"But I want you to make yourself a favorite, desired of as many women as possible. Mostly that is a matter of money, which I will attend to. I want my daughter's marriage to you to amount to something of a triumph over the others."

"Of course she will fall in love with me," Morris fairly gurgled.

"You are to win her, I said. If you do your best, you will not be responsible for failure. But she'll marry you out of pique, if for no better reason."

"And if I shouldn't want to marry her—" Ballard suggested. "Four men haven't wanted to, it seems."

For a moment Brink's face grew dark; his eyes became purple points of fire. "If you fail to do your part, you can face trial for murder, with all the witnesses but one against you," he said.

Morris grew sober. It was but a matter of shocking his nerves from one form of tension into another.

"You're giving away a rather high hand, aren't you?" he said. "You place yourself in an interesting dilemma. Obviously you either wish to marry your own daughter to a man you think a murderer, or you stand ready to jeopardize the life of one you know is innocent."

"Draw your own conclusions about what I think," answered the big man with a shrug. "But remember, young man, only

experts are called upon in court to testify as to what they think. If I ever see fit to talk at all; I'll tell what I saw."

"In other words, you intend to hound me into marrying a woman I don't love because you have got me into your power and—"

"There's no reason in the world why you shouldn't love my daughter, Mr. Morris," Brink spoke with a sudden, dignified softness in his voice. He added, "I do."

His voice broke on the two words. Morris stared at him once more. The big man's eyes had grown soft; a tear glistened in one of them.

For some moments Morris's fears and anger vanished into a feeling of sympathy again. He felt that he understood, not the outward circumstances, but the inward significance of all that had happened.

The cause, somehow, of his own predicament, as well as Brink's desperation, lay in a father's love of his child. In those moments Morris almost wished to lend himself to the man's mysterious, inexplicable plan.

But this thought drove him back to the consideration of what the plan meant to himself. It demanded his whole life. It might offer every outward comfort and luxury, the highest and easiest of positions, even a degree of professional fame; but it destroyed himself. Inwardly it made of him a pawn in the hands of another.

Everything he gained, everything he did, however pleasant, however praised by others, would be the work of another man who owned him.

Not his own abilities, but Brink's money was to establish him. Not his own wishes, but Brink's commands were to guide him socially. Not love, but fear, was to dictate even his marriage.

"Great Heaven, man!" he cried, "do you know what you are asking?"

The other seemed surprised at the query. It was some seconds before he answered it.

"I have generally been able to get more for less than I'm offering to pay," he said out of the rich man's sense and experience of power.

"It is slavery—slavery of body, mind and soul!" Morris groaned.

"Some hundreds of men have times when they think their services to me amount to slavery," retorted the millionaire. "And I don't pay them in millions or offer them the hand of my daughter, either."

"You leave them free at least to marry as they please," Morris protested.

The response to this was in the tone of a parent patiently explaining away difficulties.

"Aren't you dealing with a mere conception of freedom rather than your own personal case? Didn't you tell me yourself that you had no hope of marrying the woman you want? It's only savage sultans who can marry whom they please invariably."

His words silenced Ballard; they hardly comforted. After all, he could not give his own heart an excuse for continuing to hope for Helen's reciprocation of his affections. He could not marry whom he would.

But was this a reason for marrying one whom he would not—whom four others of her own set had refused to marry?

"I won't do it," he cried. "I won't. Maybe you can buy other men's services; maybe they'll sacrifice principles and ambitions and aims for the money you pay them. I don't know about that. You can't buy me. I will be no man's slave. My work a man can have for a wage. He can't own me."

For a long time Colonel Brink studied Morris's tense face. On his own at first was written the cynical unbelief of the man who has learned how very, very little there is that money cannot buy, save that vast much which is mere happiness. Perhaps men in public life had sometimes vociferously claimed that they were not for sale, only to come to terms in the end.

But the cynicism gave way to honest admiration as he read in the younger man's eyes that this was a genuine protest. Finally he sighed.

"I'm sorry, Morris. I really begin to like you very much. I am sure Florence will like you. I hope you'll like her. I like you so much that it positively hurts me to remind you once more of the only alternative I can offer you.

"Your show of spirit but makes my necessity the more attractive to me. I am beginning to want you as well as to have to have you, to find you desirable in addition to your being available. I really must insist—and I've tried to make you see exactly to what length I'm ready to go to insist.

"A happy marriage—happy in appearance at least—is most desirable for my daughter. You may think what you please of my methods of bringing about what I think will be a happy marriage. I'd prefer that you should think well of me; but there

isn't a man or law on earth or in hell or heaven, for that matter, that I won't sacrifice or break for my only child.

"It's my plan or the electric chair for you, since you compel me to reiterate. Stronger men than you have tried to foil me to their sorrow. If you try it, you'll find yourself bucking all the power that ten millions in cash can buy outright and that a hundred millions can influence.

"Listen: I'll switch your telephone on five minutes after I leave this room. You can do what you will to summon aid. I have not given any one an order to stop you if you leave this house and the city. They will only inform me that you have gone.

"And within ten minutes after I get that information the police of Kearney will be searching for the body of the man you slew, with enough knowledge to make sure that they find it. Within twenty-four hours there will be a reward of five thousand dollars for your capture. Every detective agency in the country; every clever newspaper reporter; every police official—will be looking for you.

"Perhaps you think the case isn't strong enough against you to bring about a conviction. Very well. I'm still a strong man; I ought to live quite a while. I'll bet my life against yours that no jury will agree on your acquittal while I'm alive. And men with a murder charge against them are not admitted to bail. How much liberty will you enjoy during the years that you are waiting for one re-trial after another?

"I want to be your friend, Morris. But I warn you not to make me your enemy."

Ballard stared at the man in horror.

"You fiend!" he cried hoarsely. "You are a more unprincipled monster than I dreamed the world contained. I'd rather die a thousand deaths than be your slave or your friend."

"And you," Brink answered in a lighter tone, "are just now a little more foolish than I supposed the callowest of youths could be. Before you start the death programme, however, I suggest that you think things over some more. Permit me to offer one more consideration. Before I get through with you I'm afraid the world might even think ill of the young lady who was your companion on the night of the murder.

"Is that the cruelest advantage I've taken yet? Let it help to convince you that I'm prepared to take all there are.

"But, really, I'd rather you looked at things more reasonably. I've offered you—or am trying to compel you to take, if you wish—about as much of material good as any man can possibly enjoy.

"As my son-in-law, you'll be the heir of my wealth. You couldn't gamble it away at race-tracks in your life-time. You can't spend it. No family could buy enough of extravagant luxuries to use it up in two generations. It is all yours. And, aside from considerations of compulsion, what is it you set up against this? An empty shadow of personal liberty that can bring you nothing, not even the love of the woman you think you want to marry.

"But I must leave you now. I have several matters to attend to before supper and you must dress. You will eat with my daughter and myself this evening. Our Sunday supper is served at eight. Meanwhile—please try to use what I've sized up for a pretty fair brain."

For an hour Morris Ballard paced the floor of the library, his face drawn, his hands clenched, his lips muttering hoarse imprecations. He was trapped, caged, bound.

Utter scoundrel or sheer madman, Brink had him. For him the world contained but one alternative, Brink's will or prison and death.

Accident or design—he might never know which—had put him into the rich man's power. It made no difference which—he was there. Brink had caught him and made him a slave.

He was in no mood to consider the manner of slavery. Many a man, perhaps he himself, would have thought it absurd to refuse the offer Brink had made, at least until he had seen and proven that the lady in question was wholly impossible.

But it had not been presented as an offer. The utter compulsoriness had been forced upon his attention.

In that light the pleasures, the luxuries, the ease, the affluence, the power to be gained took on the aspect of ashes. He was to lose, if not his soul, his right over himself, his manhood's liberty, his very self.

He would not have it. If the choice was liberty or death, he would take death.

Yes, even if the death were disgraceful, horrible, shameful in all the eyes of the world. After all, he was without relatives to share the shame. What disgrace in the sight of others could equal the torture of

having in one's own heart the humiliating knowledge that he was a slave?

All his soul arose to assure him that he was right. He resolved to act immediately. No, he would not telephone any one; he would have a try at walking from the house.

They had not taken his money from him; he had had some twenty dollars in his pocket, as was his custom when motoring, to be prepared for emergencies. And twenty dollars—

Well, he would give them a little run for their money. While he fled he would be free. When they caught him, they would put him in a different prison from this; but they would not imprison his soul.

He had spent the day in a soft smoking-jacket with which Horton had supplied him. His own clothes had been hung in a closet, fresh-pressed by the valet who must have wondered at their cheap quality.

Morris started to make the change, but whither was he going? It suddenly flashed upon him that the one place to which he wished to go was Helen's home. He wanted to share his fears, his troubles with her. He wanted her sympathy, her approbation.

Suddenly he stopped short. What was it Brink had said about her? What was it that he himself must know? Was he prepared to ask her—had he any right to ask her, to share his disgrace?

He sank into a chair. He was beaten. Brink had not overlooked any advantage; Brink had all the cards.

The choice was not even between liberty and death for himself. It was liberty or death with disgrace upon all he loved. He buried his face in his hands in an agony of despair.

"Beg pardon for being so late, sir. I 'ad difficulty in finding a proper evening suit in anything like your size, sir. And I 'ad to press it at the last moment, so to speak, sir. But we'll hurry, sir. The studs are in the shirt already. May I help you off with the one you have on?"

Slowly Morris got to his feet. The programme of his slavery had begun; the play was on. In a few moments he would meet the woman he was to try to marry—the woman who would marry him for sheer pique if for nothing better!

A glance at the clock showed him it was but ten minutes to the supper hour. In his haste he put aside his natural distaste at the thought of letting the fussy little serving-man assist him.

For the first time since his infancy another was dressing him, buttoning his shirt, adjusting his collar, knotting his tie—and doing it a heap better than he could have managed in twice the time.

Surely luxury had taken him into her lap and was petting and coddling him to the limit. But would he stay there for the petting and coddling, were it not for the iron hand that hung over him to force him back at the slightest attempt to leap down?

Well, why not? Most men, once they have been brought to face even the worst of situations, begin at once to try to make the best of them. It is meeting situations that hurts more than living with them.

Morris had determined to yield; there was nothing else for him to do. Now, as he surveyed Horton's handiwork in a full-length mirror, he saw himself arrayed as he had never been arrayed before, in the finest of linen and silk and broadcloth.

It was a terrible situation. It had taken more than death, the thought of the disgrace of the woman he loved, to frighten him into facing it. Yet worse situations might be imagined.

Only—he had yet to meet the lady.

CHAPTER IX.

ALL BUT LOVE.

MORRIS had hardly become sufficiently converted to the role he was to play to meet Colonel Brink in the utterly free-and-easy guest and host manner which he found the millionaire had adopted when a serving-man showed him into the presence of the owner of the house.

"Punctuality is a great virtue," the copper baron observed with whimsical gaiety that utterly ignored the condition in which he had left Morris an hour and a half before. "It becomes a mighty expensive one, when a man keeps promptly his engagements with a woman. We are waiting for Miss Brink."

Ballard could but scowl. The memory of the interview was still too bitter. Brink rallied him in the presence of the serving-man:

"Don't look so anxious, Morris. Florence will know you can't want her so badly as all that; and she'll put you down for a fortune-hunter."

The instant the man was gone, however, he assumed a pleasanter manner.

"By Jove, son, you're positively distinguished looking. All you need is a neat beard to make you look like three or four foreign princes rolled into one. You'll raise one, Morris. It might be as well to disguise a bit anyhow. From the look of your hair, you ought to be able to produce enough for Horton to turn into a semblance of whiskers inside a week.

"I was going to take you down to-morrow and introduce you to some of the men you'll do business with; but I guess we'll wait for the hirsute adornment to grow. It might be worth the time."

Even his personal appearance was not to be his own. Morris felt fresh surges of anger.

"For Heaven's sake, cheer up. Really, my daughter is only cross-eyed and bald-headed and unable to get teeth to fit her. She won't bite you. Ah, here she comes!"

For an instant Morris could not get courage to raise his eyes. He dreaded to look upon a face which he might have to see the rest of his days. He was ready to believe her father's words literally. One of the world's greatest fortunes had failed in the cases of four young men, to get them to the altar.

"Mr. Morris, this is my daughter," the old financier was saying. "Florence, this is the young engineer from out West I brought in last evening. I was telling you about his father and myself."

And Morris Ballard looked up into a face as beautiful as it had ever been his fortune to see.

For an instant he was staggered. He had not expected this. In his confusion he put out his hand, forgetful that this was not the thing to do. Brink was ready to cover the slight slip.

"That's the West for you, Florence. Out there they don't stand and bow at each other as if they were pretty sure they wouldn't like you. They won't suspect you of designs on their watches until you make a move to take them."

The girl laughed, musically, softly, the sort of laugh to put a man at his ease.

"Why, father," she said lightly, "you talk as if I were not a born Westerner myself."

"Which is what Morris is not," the father chimed in. "His father was president of a Boston bank when he was born; but Morris was raised in Newark, I believe. How long is it since I met you in Arizona—three years, isn't it?"

"I believe it is," Morris responded, vaguely wondering what might be coming next.

"It was an exciting meeting. Mr. Morris was in charge of the erection of a spur for the Santa Fé, that brought me ten miles nearer the Brinkle Maid mine than the main line would. I had my train run out to the end of the construction. And I got there just in time to see Morris standing off a gang of two hundred wops with a pair of empty pistols.

"He'd fired one who got too ugly about something, and the whole pack had turned on him. And before I could get out and go to his assistance or get any of the crew to move, Morris had them all gathering up their picks and shovels to start work again."

"How splendid!" the girl cried with exactly the amount of mirth in her tone to save the compliment from too much force, yet to leave it a very comforting compliment—at least for a man who had any right to receive it. As it was Morris could but gasp at his host's boldness in fabrication.

"You know," Brink went on, "that was just when the trouble in Colorado was at its height. I jumped right up and down in my hurry to offer Morris a hundred thousand a year to look after my mines up there. And what do you think? He said the job didn't look big enough for him. Santa Fé was paying him twelve thousand, and he hadn't time to spend that."

Morris looked up at the girl, though he felt the blood surging to his face. He wondered whether she was believing the wonderful yarn.

"That was one man you couldn't buy, wasn't it?" she told her father teasingly.

Voice, lips, manner went with the words. These joined to turn the little speech into a jesting half-compliment, an assurance of something a trifle more personal than merely polite pleasure in the meeting.

Into them even went that vivacious eagerness by which, whether artfully or naturally, some young women manage to endue themselves with the greatest charm of youth, its quick delight in all things new.

Plainly she was one of those rare creatures who seem always to be finding everything a much wished for but unexpected Christmas present; who live and act always as if they would say, "Oh, I've always wanted to see this, to do this, to meet some one like yourself."

Intensely alive, Morris thought as the

best to be said of her. And when a man thinks that of a woman he means that her personal charm and magnetism are worth more than any skin beauty could ever be.

Then he realized that something was lacking. The sparkle of real vivacity belongs chiefly to the eyes. And Florence Brink had accomplished only that slight widening of the lids that muscles can be made to perform. There was no sparkle in the dark, gray orbs she opened thus.

Splendid eyes they were, with that almost hypnotically compelling quality which intensified her father's power to frighten or to win. Eyes made to sparkle, they surely were.

But in them lay not joy but tragedy. Morris instantly sought to account for it by his knowledge that she had just broken off an engagement with a young man she was generally believed to have loved.

There was certainly a deep sadness in those eyes. And, behind the smile Morris felt he could detect traces of bitterness in the face.

Yet there was one thing more. It was fear. Perhaps he was led to discern it by the memory of last night's look in the father's eyes, which they resembled.

The girl seemed possessed of some idea that she was under a cloud. Perhaps she knew the nature of the danger that overhung her; Morris inclined rather to believe that she did not know.

The supper added nothing to his first impressions. Its conversation was such as might be expected at any very informal, intimate little meal. Of course, the supper amounted to as much as a fairly elaborate dinner; which is the way of suppers in such households.

Brink himself led the chatter of the table. The girl seconded him admirably. Morris must necessarily have remained a bad third under the circumstances. But he felt he saved himself from being an absolute dummy.

And Brink made up for his silence by enduing him with about as much of heroism as could safely be ascribed to an ordinary engineer's career.

Miss Brink excused herself shortly after the first coffee had been served in the library, pleading that her headache was but half cured.

"Of course, you ride, Mr. Morris," she said before parting. "All you Western men fairly grow on horses."

"Morris is an engineer, not a rancher," Brink hastily mentioned.

"I'm afraid I'm no Wild-West-Show cowboy," Ballard laughed. "But I can keep my seat on an ordinary tame horse."

What of the art he knew he had acquired on visits to his grandfather's farm in north Jersey.

"We'll give him old Prince," his host proposed.

"Will ten o'clock be too early?" asked the girl.

Morris hesitated. Should he risk an exhibit of his very limited equestrian abilities?

"Oh," Brink struck in, "Florence won't mind your having a blue chin. She'll take you through the Park. I've just convinced Morris that, if he wants to make this town think he's really a big man, he should grow a beard."

"Oh, how lovely," the girl exclaimed mischievously. "I've never seen a beard in the making."

Yet still her eyes failed of reflecting the mischief in her voice.

No sooner had she gone than Brink turned on Morris with a smile of genuine approbation and some self-congratulation.

"Well, my boy, I rather think we've put you across a little. And you didn't do more than half badly, considering how little of it I'd had a chance to let you in on. A little more pep wouldn't hurt."

"I couldn't take too big chances of giving away the fraud," Morris apologized.

"Well, I think we'll keep to about that yarn all the way around. We won't have to risk too much definiteness. I'll vouch for you with the men who'll hand you the business. A big construction company has to have quite a lot of business, you know."

"I'm not sure that I'll know enough to make a lot of business pay," Morris confessed.

"I'll do the paying. You'll be surprised at how little of it there'll be even at that. Not every man can make a big business; but there are lots of them who can keep one going, men who are merely making a clerk's wages because they never had some other fellow's chance. Big interests make big men. I shall have some incorporation papers for you to sign to-morrow afternoon. We'll get you launched as quickly as possible.

"Sorry, I couldn't have managed to take you to a concert or something this evening. You won't have much chance to go out un-

til those whiskers grow. Meanwhile we'll get you established in some swell quarters befitting a bachelor of real wealth.

"I'm going to wish you good night now. I hope the slavery doesn't look quite so terrible as to prevent your getting a little more sleep than you had last night. Really—you're not facing the worst thing in the world—eh?"

He gave a searching glance into Morris's face; but did not wait for an answer. Morris got up and went to the elevator and so to his room.

The evening had dazed him. Mostly because the change had been forced upon him, he had been unable to tolerate the thought of it. Now came the reaction.

Not the worst thing in the world to happen to a man—certainly not quite. He realized that he was a bit dazzled as well as dazed. After all, this regal life of luxurious splendor had its charms; after all few men would count as misfortune the sudden opportunity to join the foremost ranks in a highly commercial profession; after all—

A knock came to his door. Colonel Brink entered.

"Pardon me, Morris—I meant to speak of it before. It appears that your friends, the Rainsfords, were not wholly satisfied with your telephone message last night. I have ascertained that they have been trying—without much success—to interest the police further in locating you.

"I think, perhaps, it will be well for you to write Miss Rainsford something to the effect that you are quite satisfied with present conditions and desirous of being left alone to work out your new destiny. No clue to your whereabouts, you understand—you might say your disappointment in the lady's failure to requite your love had caused you to go away. You don't mind doing this, do you?"

Veiled under the query was the old threat. Morris nodded:

"I suppose I'll have to do it anyhow," he said.

"I thought you would. Let me assure you that I shall not censor the letter. I have no desire to be unnecessarily unpleasant. And I think you are getting past the need of warnings."

The colonel paused an instant, looked earnestly at Morris, then suddenly burst forth with:

"Oh, I don't want to make you do this. I want you to do it because you wish it your-

self. I want you for my friend. Still more I want you to love my daughter. Can't we go from now on without the note of compulsion in the game? Surely it isn't as bad as you seemed to think."

An instant Morris hesitated to reply. He comprehended something of the old man's viewpoint. He realized how impossible it must be for Brink to see anything but gain for the man whom he was asking to take so much.

None could have spent the past two hours with the millionaire and failed to perceive that his devotion to his daughter was almost beyond reason. She was the apple of his eye, the very idol of his soul.

"I'm not sure that I'm going to find it bad at all," Morris decided to reply.

Instantly his hand was seized in a grip that hurt it. There were genuine tears in the big man's eyes.

"Thank God!" he muttered with fatuous fervor, and then hurried from the room as if afraid to betray too much of his emotions.

And Morris sat down to write the letter. The desk in the middle of the room contained unmarked as well as crested stationery. The evening had served to stimulate his brain. Very readily he wrote:

MY DEAR MISS RAINSFORD:

A most peculiar combination of circumstances has made it at once possible, very desirable, as well as necessary for me to start life over in conditions more favorable than I might ever have dreamed of finishing it. The conditions, however, are such that it is necessary for me to sever myself completely from everything that I have been and done.

Of course this is much easier for me than it would be for many another. You know that I have no family ties whatever. My distant relatives will hardly miss me, or I miss them. I have been too busy to form friendships deep enough to cause many regrets.

Indeed, my only poignant regret will be yourself. And you are the chief occasion of my desire to get away from a life of which you formed too much a part. I think you know as well as if I had told you openly that I love you; just as I know that my love for you is hopeless, quite as well as if I had added to that grief the pain of hearing you say so.

Yet I believe you are sufficiently a friend to deserve a farewell. Something cut off our telephone last night. Anyhow, I can write what I have never dared to speak. But perhaps I have written enough. Only let me bid you cease to worry over me for our friendship's sake.

I can hardly believe myself the way things have fallen out for me as if by utter magic.

While my benefactor insists on a complete break with the past, I do not think he would mind my stating that the chances of my last night's momentary darkness brought me into contact with a man of vast wealth who, for reasons of his own, has chosen to make me his heir.

I am writing this in an exquisitely fitted library, the furnishings of which would cost me ten years' earnings. It is but part of a little guest's suite in a vast palace I have as yet not even attempted to explore. I am even inflicted with a real English valet, who insists on tying my neckties for me! I really dread to think how many servants and employees stand ready to carry out any whim I might express.

Can you blame me for throwing over a dull past for this, and a name that has never meant anything to me save that I derived it from a father whom I hardly knew in the years before he died, when I was still but a boy, and a mother whom I cannot remember at all? I myself am only glad that the break can be so complete.

For the time had come to break. Perhaps you will recall that almost my last words to you were the statement that we could not go on this way. For me the past had meant nothing but you.

Oh, Helen, how I have loved you! I don't think I had a desire or ambition in the world that did not center in you. Every effort to better myself, to advance professionally, to broaden and cultivate what little mind God had given me, to acquire enough for comfortable living—it was all with but one end in view, to make myself such a man as might win your love and be worthy of it.

And I could not go on thus. You turned my words into a jest. I know it was but kindness that prompted you to do it—to save me from the more direct and harsher rebuff you must have given, had you let me speak further. I understand, and am grateful for the mercy. It was no fault of yours that you could not love me.

But I dare not think of what life might have been if you had. Not all the luxuries into which I have tumbled can give me a purpose such as you were. I trust I shall never grow hollow enough to find in these things any true satisfaction. For they are only husks. The substance, the fruit and flower of life is love; and love has always meant and always will mean only you to me.

What a long, foolish letter I have written! I know it will seem foolish to you; for love always is foolish to one who cannot requite it. And that is another reason why I must try once more to stop, to write down this last good-by to one I know will always remain my friend, but to whom I can never remain a friend, since I can only and always be,

Your Lover,
MORRIS.

A glance showed him that his writing had grown all but illegible. For an instant he pondered, attempting to re-write or copy the letter. Then he knew he could not do it.

He steadied himself and got her name and address on to an envelope, sealed and stamped it. Hastily he pressed the call-button for the valet.

Horton was having his evening out. It was another flunkey who answered the bell. The house seemed full of these perfect, genuine, imported servants. This one's eyes batted sleepily, but he spoke with exactly correct manner:

"You rang, sir?"

"Can you post this for me so that it will go out early in the morning?" Morris asked.

"Certainly, sir," answered the man. "Will I see you abed first, sir, or afterward, sir?"

"Don't trouble about me any more this evening. I'm sorry to ask you to do this so late," Morris apologized.

"I thank you, sir," said the serving-man.

For half an hour Morris sat gazing at the door through which the man had vanished. All his life the possession of a valet had seemed to him the very epitome of extravagant, almost silly, luxuriousness. It seemed so still.

The writing of the truth had enabled him to see the truth, as is so often the case with our minds.

He knew now why Brink's plans for him were monstrous, intolerable. He knew what in the old life had filled it, and why the new life seemed ghastly in its emptiness. He knew what he had lost.

It was not the fair position he was to exchange for one incomparably better. It was no old associations of home-life he had never known or friendships he had been too busy to cultivate.

It was not his own personality—a man can never give that up. It was not liberty entirely, for only sheer obstinacy could chafe at being commanded to enjoy every earthly good.

The one real loss was Helen—love. And that, it had seemed, could not have been his in the old life.

But it was not to be his in the new. He knew that now. The splendid creature who was to be his wife might dazzle him with her beauty, her manner, her personal charm. He would never cease to admire her. He would almost certainly like her.

But he had written true. Love for him was Helen. And Helen he had lost.

He realized now that only as he had written had he given up the last of a forlorn hope. His love for her had been so

great, so all important, so all-inclusive, so much his very life, that he could not abandon it, could not learn to see its hopelessness until now—

Now he had bidden her good-by!

Suddenly he flung his hands before him upon the polished surface of the desk; he buried his face in them with a bitter groan:

"Oh, Heaven! And I've got a *valet*!"

CHAPTER X.

THE MEETING.

MRS. RAINSFORD received the letter from the postman in an afternoon delivery of the mail. She hastened to dress for the street, and went immediately to the office of the Gainville Construction Company, where Helen was employed as the confidential stenographer. Here, too, until to-day, Morris Ballard had held the position of the firm's designing engineer.

She had let Helen go to work that morning with many misgivings. Her mother's eye had told her that Helen was very nearly ill over the strange disappearance of Ballard. The girl and her father had returned home from their bootless search of hospitals and police-stations just in time to catch the telephone message Morris had begun the first moment he had been alone at Brink's place.

That message had but served to increase the girl's fears. She had guessed that the sudden cutting off of the connection had stopped Morris from telling her the truly important thing. Her heart had taught her to grasp the significance of most of her lover's inflections. She had not missed the tensing of his voice.

Frantically she had tried first to regain the connection by working the hook of the receiver. When this had brought her only the home central operator, she had asked to be connected again. This was accomplished after some delay.

She was ready to swear that she recognized the voice which answered; that it was the voice of the big, gray-haired man who had calmly told her Morris had never entered the old house by the river. Now it as calmly assured her that no one had telephoned over that wire, that it had never heard of Morris Ballard, that "my dear madam" must be mistaken in the number.

The wire over which the message had been sent was one of those private affairs

kept by busy men, its number not listed in the directory or known, save by a few such business intimates as his broker and the manager of his office and the members of his household. It could be connected with the telephones branching from the house switchboard, as had been done upon Morris's arrival. It usually was not so connected.

The central operator, a little fearful of using the wire for a recall, since she knew it had been shut off from the subscriber's end, "listened in" long enough to apprehend the fact that Brink did not wish to keep on talking or to make known his identity. Wherefore she had promptly refused Helen's request for the address with which the wire was connected, as well as the wire's number. A manager to whom Helen had finally succeeded in complaining courteously but firmly backed up the operator with telephone company rules.

The conclusions Helen reached had failed to impress her father. Mrs. Rainsford was not sure about them. Helen had spent all of Sunday in futile efforts to get some one interested enough to do a little investigating.

Quite naturally all the police to whom she had appealed had put her off without giving any definite satisfaction. They were not looking for unnecessary work. The man who was missing had been heard from, accounted for sufficiently.

What if she did think some man had said Morris Ballard had not entered the house? What if nobody had found any trace of this man? Nobody seemed to want him anyhow.

And, what had the mysterious taxicab to do with it? And why worry because she hadn't found out the rightful name of the sanatorium? He would be out in a couple of days, he had explained—what more was needed?

The police hadn't picked up the amnesia victim as the first message had stated? Well, somebody must have picked him up. Why worry so long as the man seemed safe? Really, unless they could see some better reason than now appeared for doing so, they could hardly afford time to solve all the details of a riddle for which they already had the main answer.

The Kearney police, since the thing had happened in their town, had taken the trouble to send a man down to the coal-yards to interview the men who had gone to Helen's assistance. They seemed to feel

that they had rather over-worked themselves in doing that. All those men could tell was what Helen had said about a light in the window, the old man, the strange taxicab.

One man, however, maintained his interest. He was the man who had carried the lantern through the old house.

Like most people who accept a theory very strongly, he had taken as strong a hold on the opposite one when his first idea was shaken from its foundations. Also, perhaps, his sense of justice required him to make up in a measure for having made too plain his original misjudgment of the girl.

Herman Adams, he said his name was. He lived in a mean little shack a quarter of a mile from the scene of Morris's disappearance. He passed the old house daily.

He had spent half of Sunday afternoon piloting Helen about in a dirty row-boat from one to another of the nearest boat-clubs, to inquire if any of them had any knowledge of any craft which might have provided tramps with means for an exodus from the old Brink homestead.

This had brought another bit of information too apparently unimportant for police consideration. A motor-boat of rather unusual type for the river had come up it just as dusk was getting near to dark.

It had shown no great speed, though of a design generally built for extreme swiftness. It had not been seen this morning. Nobody was quite sure where it had stopped last night.

The boating men were quite detailed in descriptions of the boat, and fairly agreed in the details. It was from thirty to thirty-five feet long, about five feet of beam, V-bottom construction of wave-collecting hydroplane—whatever that might mean. A more significant detail was the possession of an engine of remarkable silence and under-water exhaust.

Over this Adams shook his head. Again he had his theory and was holding it. His theory was that tramps had stunned Morris with a club and thus knocked the memory from him for a while, robbed him, carried him across the river in a boat, and turned him loose on the shore. Such river runabouts as the motor-boating fraternity described cost thousands of dollars and are not for tramps.

But Adams promised to keep an eye on the house in future. He agreed to telephone Helen any time anything suspicious should

develop. He declined to consider her promise to reimburse any loss of time he might sustain.

Helen had not slept Sunday night any more than she had slept on the night before. She was unalterably convinced that Morris had, for some reason, been kidnaped and was being held by his captors. Having been pretty thoroughly convinced by now that there was nothing she could do about it, she had gone to her work this morning. Idleness, or more useless searching would drive her mad.

Her mother delivered the letter into her trembling fingers. The girl's white face frightened Mrs. Rainsford.

"Read it," she urged, as much to keep her daughter from fainting as from her own interest in the man she had long known held the key to Helen's heart.

Three lines Helen read aloud. Then she could not abide the slowness of her lips. She read on in silence.

Her pallor grew deeper and deeper. Thoroughly alarmed for her, Mrs. Rainsford went to the cooler and brought a glass of water.

"Drink this, dear—and tell me what it is," she urged.

Without removing her eyes from the paper, Helen took the glass and gulped a little of the iced water. She read on; she picked up the first sheet of the long epistle and began to read it again.

"What is it? What does he say?" Mrs. Rainsford pleaded.

"Oh, mother," the girl whispered in a tone of awed fright, "he's gone insane. They've done something to him. He has a hallucination that he's been adopted by a millionaire, that he's living in luxury with countless servants and a valet—and—"

"Oh, mother—read it—think for me—I shall go mad myself."

"You come home," Mrs. Rainsford commanded severely. "You're in no condition to try to do any more here."

And Helen obeyed weakly. Mrs. Rainsford put the family exchequer to the extravagance of a taxicab for the second time within forty-eight hours. The moment they were at home, she telephoned for the family doctor.

For two months after that her father reduced his life savings on doctors and sanatoriums, until one physician, wiser than the others, advised that the only hope for her shattered nerves lay not in enforced rests

but in letting her do what she could to solve the problem which had broken them.

Helen went back to her old position and began to regain some of her strength. Her salary went to a first-class detective agency. She was working as best she might for her lover.

For Morris had written just the word too much. Like the story she had told the police, his story seemed too improbable for credence.

Had he written that he had obtained another position as good as the one he had lost, she might have accepted his statement. His talk of vast wealth belonged with the fairy stories she had quit believing at nine.

Besides, she knew she had seen a light, talked with an old man, been warned to silence by another, been cursed by the man in the taxicab. These things did not jibe with a tale of lost memory leading a man to adoption by a multi-millionaire. The tale lent itself much better to her theory that he had been attacked and injured, and was somewhere enduring pitiful mental derangement, none the less pitiful because its hallucinations were dreams of untold riches.

The detective agency worked a month on the case with her money's worth of faithfulness. Then its activities became known to detectives of another agency which Brink was employing to warn him of any dangerous activities on her part. Brink promptly bought it off.

It was honest enough to throw up the case and quit taking the girl's hard-earned dollars. The agency reported that it had covered every institution for the insane within five hundred miles of New York, and inquired of all in the land. Every doctor who maintained even the smallest of private sanatoriums; a thousand who might merely have sent a patient to some quiet boarding house had been asked for information.

The vice president of the Gainville Construction Company valued Helen Rainsford's services highly and esteemed her more highly from a personal standpoint. Two weeks after she received the detective agency's report he gave the girl a two weeks' vacation, in spite of her two months' absence from duty in the early summer. For she had begun again to decline from the moment when her earnings ceased to go to the quest for Morris, when the only interest she could muster had been again taken from her.

For her there could be but one employment, one eternal activity. Her vacation she spent in the only manner of search which seemed left.

Something told her that, if she looked long enough, unless Morris was being held absolutely confined, she must meet him. All the known places for confining men with the type of affliction she believed he had were already eliminated. It seemed to her most probable that he was not violently insane.

She had, in fact, built up a tentative theory hardly less likely than the fantastic truth. Even to herself its only merit seemed to lie in the fact that it was as yet unproven, while all the others but one had failed. The one that Morris was dead she refused to believe.

His captors had not killed him immediately. He had talked to her—written to her since he had been taken. And they would have had better reasons for killing quickly than later.

It was unlikely that they were holding him long. Evidently they had found no profit in doing so; they had made no attempt to get a reward. She pictured him turned adrift, beggared, perhaps cared for by some kindly soul too ignorant to realize how much better he would be in an institution, perhaps with mind enough left to earn some pittance and to be sufficiently conscious of his own weakness to reveal his pitiful condition to any he had known in former days.

So she haunted the poorer streets of New York. She rode for hours on open trolley cars, she walked so far as her strength would carry her, she made pretexts for looking into sweatshops and dingy factories, she dawdled over cheap food in the front windows of little restaurants opposite ten and fifteen-cent lodging houses at the hours when the men were coming and going thickest, or sitting most in the open windows of the reeking and dingy reading-rooms.

She used up her two weeks. She asked for and got another week. She counted off its hours as they were taken from the almost hopeless future and added to the hopeless past.

Heaven knew how she was standing it. She did not know. Her will, her purpose, were keeping her alive. And she was nearing the end of the time for the exercise of these.

She could not ask for a longer holiday. The firm had been more indulgent than the best of employees had the right to expect. Her father's savings were exhausted. Her earnings were needed at home. For her mother was worrying over her to a degree which incapacitated her for the housework, and a good maid was imperative.

Could she live, could she work again for any other object than her love? Her fagged muscles, her reeling brain refused to hope that she could.

She told herself that she must, then finished the rounds of all the seamen's employment agencies for the meagre, hopeless scraps of information they might give her but never did. The idea of Morris having turned to the sea had come at sight of a navy recruiting station's billboard.

And Saturday had come and gone; Sunday was going.

She could hardly believe it. The longing in her heart had seemed one of those tremendous necessities that could not be denied her.

She had spent two sadly needed dollars for a taxicab, had made the rounds of more rescue missions than she dreamed existed—made them because poor men and derelicts went to such places—made them without result.

In each of them her lips had framed a brief, frantic prayer, as her eyes swept the sorry looking worshipers. The prayer had not been answered.

And the last of these had disgorged its little flock of human flotsam some moments before she reached it. Two others had been closed and locked for the night. And she was passing the Christopher Street ferry-house on West Street. There was nothing more to do—nothing but to go home.

Often she had wondered what she would do if she found him. Her brain gave her no answer. But her heart told her that she would love him back to health and sanity again.

No more would shyness hold her aloof. His letter had told his love. She would wait for nothing more.

But—she had not found him.

She dismissed the cab, walked across the street. A ferry-boat was just discharging its passengers and a long line of motor-cars of those who had been spending the bright October day on Jersey roads. Hardly noting whither she went, she had taken the

wrong side of the building. She paused to wait until the automobiles were past and she might reach the passenger entrance.

Some slight tangle ahead halted the line. A splendid runabout stood purring directly in front of her.

"We've plenty of time," one of the occupants remarked to the other.

Instantly every nerve in the girl's racked body tautened. She looked up at the two men. Her eyes leaped from the rugged, though somewhat aged features of the one to the trim bearded countenance of the other, leaped back again.

She had never seen the older man's face before; he had shaded it with his hand as he talked to her that night in May at the door of the old house by the Passaic. Instinct alone told her that it was he.

But it had been Morris's voice that she had heard. She shot her glance back to the bearded face, pierced its disguise, knew him!

She tried to raise her voice in a cry. Shock had taken her voice. She but whispered his name:

"Morris!"

She tried again—

But she had not needed to speak. He had turned. He, too, had had to look longer than the space of a mere glance to recognize her pinched features.

Into his face leaped wonder, longing, love. His lips parted as if to answer her feeble utterance of his name.

Somehow she had taken in every detail of his attire. Afterward she knew he was not functioning as a mere chauffeur, though he was driving the splendid car. The fine overcoat he was wearing was not the quality to be bought by chauffeurs or the style to be furnished them by their employers.

But her name had frozen on his lips. He had hastily looked away. The older man had looked at her, recognized her, turned with a snap upon him—

"Drive on, Morris. What the devil are you—?"

But Morris had begun to speed the engine, had shoved in the clutch before he had been bidden. The car responded with a leap, shot to the left and around the one ahead of it, drowning with cut-out exhaust the sharp words of the iron gray man beside her lover.

Ten steps Helen Rainsford tottered after the fleeing motor, her hands outstretched, her lips parted in a cry that did

not come. Then she stumbled, fell and saw and knew no more.

CHAPTER XI.

THE MAN WITHOUT A MEANING.

IT was all absurdly easy for Morris Ballard, or Reginald Morris, as he had now become.

The Brinks had lived in New York ever since Florence's early childhood. Her father, a man exceptionally quick in adapting himself, had in his own case proven pretty much what he had said to Morris as to the possibilities of an unattached man entering the social circle which, if not quite the most aristocratic, is the most advertised in the metropolis.

The man had spent a fortune to prepare his child for a place in that society and the place for her. Her beauty and personal charm had more than seconded his efforts.

She had been sufficiently established socially to make her acceptable as a daughter-in-law of Mrs. Van Cleef, who was one of the leaders of the so-called smart set, and at the same time well established in the older, more dignified circle that is the social thirty-third degree in New York and America.

Brink began the program for Morris by depositing to his account three hundred thousand dollars, and adding the purchase of a yacht that cost nearly as much more. This was to provide immediate spending money.

By the simple process of transferring sufficient mining stock and then buying it back from Morris, the money was made to appear as the "Western" man's very own, to any prying banker who might suspect that the colonel was creating a husband for his daughter.

In buying out the entire business of the Manhattan Steel Construction Company, much the same process was employed.

Morris had been really interested in this transaction. To be the head of so great a concern, to direct its business, control its affairs and its army of employees—would have been a wonderful thing, if he had been permitted to do it.

He wasn't. A manager who knew a hundred times more than Morris about such a business remained in charge. Hired engineers did the planning and executing of the actual work. And Ballard more than

half suspected that Brink money helped in bringing in at least the public works which constituted the most of the business done by the concern.

Morris sat in the office for two or three hours on such days as were not occupied with yachting, racing, motoring and a complete vacation which had occupied most of the summer.

And his days in the office were rather his most humiliating. He was there to sign the papers the manager brought to him. The manager would have been disgusted had he shown any inclination to interest himself in what he signed.

Fortunately Morris realized this before he laid himself open to the discomfiture he must have suffered had he questioned the manager's acts.

There were days when Morris would gladly have fired the manager and taken up the job himself, with all the risk of wrecking a million-dollar concern. But he felt it was not his concern to risk, or his million.

He was "in" on some of the great stock movements which have made Wall Street lively since the day it ceased to be scared to death over the Europeans' difficulties. He sat in council with the men who could and did manipulate the movements. He played their game.

And he made a million dollars or two—he was not quite sure which. Brink had furnished him the cards and directed the play.

The luxuries had palled utterly inside the first month. A captain and crew sailed his yacht for him. A wise stableman picked the horses he owned, and clever jockeys rode them to victory or defeat.

He could and did drive his own car; but he never got either the fun of tinkering them into running order, or of racing them into scrap. He had reached the age where mad speed and sheer neck-risking afforded no pleasure; a man was always at hand to attend to troubles which rarely occurred with such motors as he owned.

He did his own dancing, ate his own long-drawn-out dinners, did his own talking. At this last he rather outdid himself. The diffidence which had always rather troubled him quickly vanished as he ceased utterly to care anything about the people he talked with.

He read a lot. It was about the one thing he did because he chose to do it. He wondered what earthly use his information

might ever be to him; but it showed in his conversation, and he gained the reputation of being well informed as well as clever in expression.

Unconsciously he was learning a tremendous amount. He was rapidly gaining the place where, if left to do it, he could speedily take up the reins and manage even so vast and varied interests as those of his father-in-law-to-be.

But the knowledge brought no comfort. He felt no real interest in using it. For he could never overcome the sense of serving as a mere dummy, of playing another man's game. And he could never quite convince himself that he was going to stay in the game at all.

All told, he was probably the most bored man in New York and Newport long before the summer ended. He envied the younger fellows who could show their boredom, cut loose, make fools of themselves from San Francisco to the Dardanelles. But he could not do it; his natural good breeding prevented his telling the social mamas how utterly weary they made him. He was very rich, very leisured, quite decently moral, unusually settled and sane for his years. The mamas began to set their caps for him; their daughters helped as the mamas directed.

Then Brink told him he thought it was time for the engagement to come about.

Of course, though he had taken half a floor of the most expensive hotel in New York as his domicile, Ballard had seen more of Florence Brink than of the many other girls in her set. All told, he was forced to confess that he liked her better than any of the others.

He had steeled himself to forget Helen. The memory of her was too poignantly painful. He reached the point where he generally believed he had been successful in the forgetting.

Yet there were moments when he caught himself dreaming—dreaming of a quiet cottage in the Oranges—dreaming of a life without eternally watchful servants, a life of struggle, perhaps, but of struggle with a purpose, and the purpose sitting opposite him over a decent meal of home cooking—Helen.

"Fool," he snarled at himself. "Helen doesn't want you."

Had he not known Helen it is quite possible he would have fancied himself in love with Florence Brink.

He was nearer to it than ever before at the time when the father gave the word for the betrothal. For he had made himself believe that he could fall in love with her if he could once get the life and animation to shine in her eyes for him.

And he had tried for a fortnight to do it. He tried when he proposed.

He prepared for the proposal quite methodically. A splendid ring had been made to his order. He waited for one of those days, rare enough last September, when there was sunshine to prevent him from being as completely melancholy as rainy days now made him.

A fast motor-skiff bore him across Newport Harbor from his own yacht to Brink's. He had chosen the morning because he was surest of finding her in one of her simple yachting costumes which he had learned to regard as the most fetching garments she wore.

Some enthusiasm was necessary; he needed every stimulus he could get.

"A really pretty day at last," he remarked, as he led her to a seat on the after deck, apart from the two or three guests who were lolling forward.

"Yes, I was almost tempted to put out for a sail," she responded. "Only, I couldn't think of any other place any prettier than this to look at. Isn't the view lovely to-day?"

He had hoped she would ask some such question. The answer was rather the easiest lead he had thought up for what must follow.

"I'm finding it so," he responded, and his eyes really twinkled a little as he gazed steadily into her face until she turned and met them and caught his meaning.

"Silly—and horribly broad," she criticised his compliment. "I really thought better of you than that."

"I've never been sure that you thought well of me at all," he answered, pleased at the easy turn things were making for him.

"Oh, everybody thinks well of you," she told him hastily.

"And I don't give a hang what everybody thinks of me," he returned. "I do want you to."

And the light did not come into her eyes. Under the slight tan of the summer's yachting her face paled a little.

She looked away; it was a troubled gaze she rested on the placid ripples to windward. Another woman would have guessed

that she had awaited with dread the scene she now knew she must live through.

Since she was silent Ballard plunged into the proposal he had prepared. He never could have used such form on the girl he loved. He had never managed to propose to her at all.

"It is true, Florence; absolutely true. You know that I have never been used to the sort of life you lead and the one I have led since we met each other. The whole thing—the whole crowd—seem unspeakably silly to me. Just one thing I have hoped would reconcile me to living this way, with all the flunkies and the ghastly, empty idleness. If once I could have seen the sparkle I know belongs in your eyes—if once I could be sure that sparkle was for me—

"But it has never been," he hurried on. "Your lips, your well-trained voice, your carefully controlled features—have laughed gaily. Your eyes never laugh in my presence. The outside of the house is bright and beautiful; the music is quite perfect; but the curtains are always drawn over the windows of your soul.

"Yet I am going to take my plunge, throw my dice. Long ago I resolved never to ask a woman to marry me until I had seen some reason for believing she would. But I cannot wait any longer. I must know. Will you marry me, Florence?"

His voice trembled suddenly as he reached the end. It had flashed across his thought that she might say no.

Surely then her father could demand no more. Surely he would be satisfied to let him go in peace away from all this wretched empty show, back to his old life, back to Helen. The tremor sounded more like genuine emotion than any other he could have felt.

As he finished it seemed to him his heart stopped beating. He felt as if some vessel were about to burst in his throat. He gulped convulsively.

His head swam once more with the vision of what she might give him by her "no," what she would take from him forever by her "yes." It seemed that he would never quite learn that Helen did not love him.

"Yes, Reginald, I will marry you," the girl said softly, without turning toward him or lifting her eyes from the rippling surface of the water.

He gulped again, to choke back the

groan that rose within him. He was glad only that she looked away, that she could not see the strange effect of her words.

With a mighty effort he pulled himself together, remembered that he had planned here for the kiss that should seal their betrothal, drew a little closer to her.

Slowly she turned to face him. And there was light in her eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

THE SHADOW.

THEN he realized dully that she was drawing her face from his reach, as she perceived his purpose. He questioned the light in her eyes, as he watched its calm glow.

Was it the light of love—or of purpose? Her first words told him.

"No, Reginald, don't do that yet. I will marry you—but not until you know all the truth that I can tell you, and then ask me to marry you again.

"First of all, I do not love you."

He was completely taken aback by her words.

"You do not love me?" he repeated slowly, dazed.

"No. I like you too well to marry you until you knew that. I'm not sure that I don't like you well enough to marry you willingly. Certainly there is none I would rather marry—any more. Sometimes I wish I were a Catholic and could enter a convent and not marry at all.

"But it seems I must marry. Father has set his heart upon it, made it a regular obsession."

Again she paused. He still floundered, all at sea as to whither she was leading.

"You like me well enough to marry me—but you don't love me." He echoed her words.

"Since I must marry some one, yes. I'm not sure that I wouldn't think I loved you if—if I didn't know better."

"How do you know?" he asked, mostly because she suggested the query.

"Because—" she hesitated, then began again—"Yes, I'll tell you the truth. Heaven knows I wouldn't tell it to another on earth. You probably know of my broken engagements. One of them—well, it taught me what love was. That's how I know.

"And you know what love is, too. Somehow I've felt that from the moment I saw

you first. I'd almost like to believe you know by your love for me. Only—it wouldn't be fair. We can marry fairly as it is, you see.

"And sometimes I've hoped that I could learn to love you. Do you think you could learn to love me?"

There was nothing more remote from her query than any note of coquetry. She had elected to tear down all masks. She asked the question to get at the truth.

"I hope I could," he answered.

"And you still wish to try?"

"Yes," he said thickly. He was glad of her honesty, if he could not match it himself.

"Then we'll try. I'm afraid it's the only thing that will save father's reason. But—one thing more—you know all about me, don't you?"

He stared at her again.

"I—I know you, I think," he answered, freshly mystified.

"You know—why the others didn't marry me?" she went on.

"I thought it was because you refused to marry them," he answered.

"Oh," she cried.

The agreement of perfect candor had seemed to brighten her greatly, to lift a load from her shoulders. Now her happiness vanished.

"I thought you knew. You—you came on the scene just at the time of the break with Howard Van Cleef. And—and father said to me just after our first meeting, 'There's a man who *will* marry you.' I thought you knew all about it."

"Don't worry about that," he bade her. "You don't need to tell me unless you wish to."

"But I can't tell you," she answered, all the trouble coming back to her face. "I don't know. I'm afraid it's something—something dreadful about father.

"He's become all but a nervous wreck each time there's seemed some promise of my getting married. He's seemed almost crazy to have things over and settled. And then he's talked with each one of them and come to me looking as if it killed him to tell me I must break the engagement.

"The first time I was rather glad of the chance. I had become engaged only to please father; only because he seemed so wildly anxious to have me do so. He had been that way ever since a mooning young simpleton with a good family and four mil-

lions behind him had quit bothering me while I was still in school.

"And two of the other three engagements I made solely to satisfy this mania of his. One—was the one that taught me the meaning of love. They've all ended alike. And the one hurt when it ended.

"Oh, I wish you knew. Father won't tell me. None of the others would tell me. And they were all fine enough to say that I had broken the engagement. Oh, I wish you had known."

Her face grew white with sudden fulness of comprehension of her own wretchedness.

"What shall I do?" she cried. "He'll go mad, if we don't become engaged. I'm not sure that I won't go mad if this awful thing doesn't clear. It haunts me day and night. Once I thought nothing could be worse than a loveless marriage. But this is worse.

"Since I could not marry for love, I would rather marry you than any of the rest for friendship. But you will find out—it must be something they find out—and the happiness of friendship will be snatched from me. Oh, I thought you knew."

At last he saw the depths of her character. He liked her better than he had ever done before. It was not love—it never would be love. But he would have been sheerly brutal not to wish to protect and help the girl in her very obvious distress.

"I don't think it will make any difference, Florence," he said with deliberate quietness. "If you'll just look at it calmly enough, you'll see why. As you've said, we're marrying not for love. I can imagine nothing that could really change things—nothing that need change them. Everything I can think of leaves matters about where they are."

"But," she cried, "supposing there were some crime. Father is a fearful man in some ways—so big and powerful and—yes, ruthless. I have seen him angry. I have wondered if some time in anger—"

She could not speak what she thought.

"I am afraid I have better reasons than you to know something of that," Ballard made answer. "I have seen him angry. I veritably believe he would kill rather than be thwarted in some of his purposes. The fact that he had done so would not, could not alter my purpose of marrying you."

The girl eyed him half doubtingly. His wish to restore her to some degree of happiness enabled him to smile in soft corroboration of his words.

"And there could really be nothing worse than that," she said slowly, half as if to herself, half as pleading for one word more of assurance.

Morris could think of a number of things that, in the eyes of men, might seem vastly worse to know about the woman they were to marry than that her father had committed some kinds of murder—at all events, so long as he had escaped the penalties and their stigma. But—

"I could imagine nothing worse than murder," he answered firmly.

Suddenly she put her hand in his. Not for an instant did he regard the act as a token of love. It was gratitude, an almost childlike act of trust in a friend she thought stronger than herself.

It might grow into love. Since they must marry, he more than half hoped it would. And, within his own heart, he hoped that this sense of protecting her weakness, of helping her to escape some dark cloud might at least serve as a tender, gentle substitute for love.

Once more he bent his face toward hers.

"No," she murmured, "let's wait for that until love—some real love has come. We're going to be great friends, Reginald. I'm not sure about the love—not sure—but I'm glad it's you rather than any but the one—the one—"

Her voice lost itself. He knew of what she was thinking.

She was choking back sobs when she spoke again.

"Reginald, my good friend, I—please, let me go to my stateroom now—I've got to cry."

He sat still after she was gone. For a while his mind dealt only with the pleasant thought that they understood, and that their understanding had paved the way for a life that might not be entirely void of happiness. Perhaps—

No, he could not love any one but Helen. Suddenly, out of the memories of the words Florence had spoken to him, flashed her idea of the worst her father might have done. He had said that could make no difference.

But—couldn't it? Suppose he could learn of some crime that could be held over the man's head to buy his silence from the unjust accusation with which Brink had tied Morris hand and foot.

Blackmail? Well, what else was Brink doing to him? Brink knew as well as he

that the killing of the man in the old house was an accident.

He would know. He would find out what the strange thing was that the girl feared. He would use it to free himself.

He got up, started across the deck, more purpose in his step than had shown there for four months. Free!

He did not know how he would find out the dark secret that had sent four men and a fifth away from the flame of their desire. He was sure now that it did not concern the girl so much as her father, for the girl's intense honesty had shown in her anxious, troubled eyes as she spoke.

Those other five men had learned the secret. He would learn it and be free!

Then, as suddenly as he had started up he dropped into another of the many easy wicker chairs that littered the deck. His face paled. His heart sank.

For he had just bound himself by a chain more absolute than any Brink had fastened on him. This soft and easy life was turning him selfish, as it had seemed to make most who lived it; but he hoped he was still a man and a gentleman. And he had just given a lady his word to be her friend, to marry her in friendship.

"Fool! Fool!" he cried.

Then, suddenly, he laughed bitterly.

Why should he care for freedom? Would he never learn that freedom had not given him Helen when he had it, would not give it to him now?

And so he settled down to make the best of things.

His engagement was announced. It was an important event, important enough to gain publication even in Europe's war-filled papers. For Brink had hobnobbed with kings as well as with governors and presidents.

Arrangements were made for a speedy wedding. Brink seemed unable to wait the consummation of it. He drove his daughter closer and closer in a bit of bargaining that would have tickled Baxter Street's second-hand clothes dealers. The pair were to be married in St. John's Cathedral on Thursday, the seventh of October.

The girl's father seemed to bear out all she had said of his almost insane anxiety as the date approached. It was an embarrassing anxiety for Morris. He knew that every move he made was watched.

He could not leave his hotel without having his motor trailed by another, which al-

ways seemed swift enough to keep up with driving that racked his nerves with its speed. He was not sure of the waiters, chambermaids, bell-boys—some, if not all of whom were in Brink's pay.

The man was mad. His love for his daughter had become an obsession. His brain, which was truly unusual in its power along most lines, had fastened upon the idea that a place in society—the society he had known earlier only from newspapers—was the greatest thing a woman might have, since it seemed the fewest women had it.

Though he himself cared nothing for the social whirl, no mother could have been so utterly dominated by social ambition for her child.

That was all Morris could see in it. Sometimes, as he wondered indifferently about the cloud which troubled the girl, though he knew it could not alter things for him, he wondered if Brink were possessed of some added desire to repair some hidden blot he himself had put upon his name.

All there was for Morris, he convinced himself, was to make the best of it.

On Saturday, the second of October, he entered the hotel, returning from some uptown affair. As usual, he went to the desk for his key.

"Just a moment," said the clerk. "The operator has just taken a wireless for you. Here—"

The telephone man hurried up to hand over what he had just received. Morris read it. Then he tucked it into his pocket, almost certain that he had barely escaped having its contents taken down for Brink's benefit.

It might interest Brink; it certainly interested him. In his own library he read the message again before throwing it into the grate.

Am returning aboard United States. Arrive Sun. P.M. Will call your hotel Sun. Evening. H. B. VAN CLEEF.

Well enough he knew that Van Cleef, immediately after the breaking of his engagement with Florence Brink, had sailed for Europe to throw himself into the broil there. Society had gossiped all summer over fragmentary reports that he had been wounded, mortally, slightly, mortally again, killed, had recovered.

What his return at this time might mean Morris could only guess. But he would be in his room Sunday evening.

Then he recalled the appointment he had with Brink to go to Newark to-morrow afternoon. Over there a big financier was in distress. Brink's wide interests included friendship for the man. Morris had almost unwittingly acquired an interest in a business which might suffer.

It was part of the older man's program to push Morris forward as one of much bigger affairs than he really was. Ballard believed he would be back in time, but he took the precaution to bid the hotel people ask Van Cleef to wait, if he himself should be delayed.

He said nothing to Brink of the wireless message and the expected visitor. He had nothing to fear from having Brink find it out afterward. Brink was in the position of most blackmailers, with just one punishment to threaten which could never be used more than once. Unless Morris should attempt to escape from marriage with Florence, his exposure as a murderer would be the last thing Brink would bring about.

But that the colonel would resort even to violence to prevent an interview with Van Cleef was more than a remote possibility.

And sheer curiosity would have been sufficient to make Morris wish the interview. The young society man's return from Europe at this time, coupled with the message, constituted a fresh mystery. What did Van Cleef want?

Morris had been quite sure, though Florence had never told him, that Van Cleef was the one of her four or five suitors whom she had loved. The newspapers had remarked that the engagement had been regarded as a love-match on both sides.

But Morris knew now that Van Cleef had demanded his freedom. He had gone away leaving the world to think he had been jilted.

Why he should come back now and demand to see his rejected sweetheart's new lover was quite enough of a mystery to pique the curiosity of one who found his own life intolerably dull. His message had caused Morris's heart to skip a few beats.

Anything unexplained might open the way for release from the situation; and the faintest hope of release was enough to show Ballard just how little he had accomplished in reconciling himself to it.

The business which took Brink and Morris to Newark on Sunday afternoon was more tedious and less interesting than Bal-

lard's worst fears could have imagined. When it had lasted until after 10 o'clock in the evening, he grew nervous.

He did not wish to excite the multi-millionaire's suspicions by urging a hasty return to New York. He could but wait and hope that Van Cleef would wait for him.

But Brink suddenly became hurried enough to satisfy him. At ten minutes after ten, happening to glance at his watch, the big man rose with a jerk:

"I must reach my office in time to telephone a man at eleven," he spoke in considerable agitation. "Do you think we can do it, Morris?"

They got off immediately. It was by virtue of Ballard's recent attempts to clear himself of pursuing motor-cars that he was able to put the powerful runabout across the meadows at a rate on which Brink could not have counted.

"I didn't know you were a speed maniac," he commented. "We'd better go over to Hoboken, though. The Pennsylvania ferry service is too slim since they got the tubes."

They reached Hoboken to see the gates of the Barclay Street boat closed behind as many automobiles as it could possibly hold. A guard told them they could make the Christopher Street boat yet.

Brink bade Morris run the car to the other slip, saying they could get back to Barclay street much more quickly than if they waited for the next down-town boat.

It was still but a quarter to eleven when the boat landed. Brink fumed at the slowness of the long line of cars and wagons ahead of them. The warm October weather was taxing the whole ferry service to the utmost with the burden of automobiles it was called on to carry.

"Now we can shoot," Brink cried anxiously, as they passed the gate.

Instantly he added a muttered curse of impatience as they were halted by the momentary blockade outside.

"We've plenty of time," Morris was going to add that he would make the office in three minutes since, once clear of the ferry crowd, they would find no traffic on the down-town streets on Sunday night.

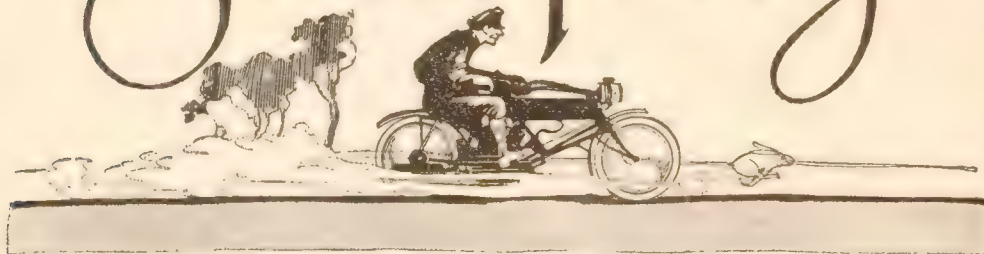
And then he noticed the woman who had halted to let the line of motors pass. He started, looked at her more searchingly.

His breath stopped half drawn. His heart seemed to leap up into his throat.

It was Helen!

(To Be Concluded.)

Solid Ivory



by George M. Johnson

EVER meet a lad with a bean of such adamant texture that it would sink in a tank of quicksilver? Well, Ole Swensen was the proud possessor of exactly that sort of a bean. Bud Adams had Ole's number from the start.

"Why," says Bud, "if brains was re-tailing at a thousand dollars an ounce, that gink's entire product wouldn't bring the price of a thimbleful of cylinder oil."

Yet there was something attractive about Ole. His eyes were so blue and smiley and good-natured, no matter how the fellows kidded him, that you could make some allowance for his cerebrum and cerebellum not meshing worth a shorted spark-plug.

Besides, everybody likes to feel superior, and the veriest dub that ever straddled a motorcycle couldn't help feeling brainy in comparison with poor Ole.

The first time he drifted into the Regal agency he received mighty little attention. The last word in motorcycles, the newest model of the season, had just been uncrated, and a fair-sized mob of old-time riders were lamping her from all sides, every mother's son of 'em jabbering a sixty-per clip. It was worse than the village gossip brigade mobilized around a pot of Orange Pekoe.

Ole hung around the outside of the group for an hour, looking at the new machine over the heads of those embryonic engine experts, which was as close as he could get to it. The next evening he was around again, this time beating the crowd, so he had a good chance to give the boat the once-over.

The boss threw him a tow-line in about

two seconds. To old Jenks every one was a prospect, and the way he could convince a chap that the one thing he needed was a two-wheeler was more than a caution.

Jenks could sell a motorcycle to a retired minister with one leg and near-sighted to boot without unlimbering half his heavy artillery. Believe me, Xanthippe, Jenks was some salesman!

He saw right away that Ole was virgin soil, so he started in with his education. Ole's blue orbs blinked before the volley of technical terms—suction stroke, compression, exhaust valve, carbureter, high-tension mag, and all the rest—that burst in his face like a shrapnel shell.

"Now you've got the general idea, haven't you?" Jenks asked.

"Ya-as," drawled the prospect in his soft, slow voice; "but dere's van ting Ay don't yoost see."

"Shout it out, my boy!" cried the boss.

"Ay don't yoost see vat makes her go midout pedals."

"Good night!" gulped Jenks. "Never mind what makes her go, Ole," he went on, seeing it was hopeless. "She just goes, that's all. Now this machine is precisely what you want to ride to work on. You see—" *et cetera*.

Ole was a goner, even though he tried to resist, which he didn't.

A blind man could have told that the big, blond Swede was motorcycle mad. He had seen the machines, bright with satin enamel and glistening with polished nickle, purring smoothly along while he had to hoof it, until the fever had soaked into his blood like a dose of malaria.

So one morning we started him off on a new bus, ears buzzing with instructions that made about as much impression on his fossiliferous dome as rain-drops on a granite ledge. But proud! That Swede was the proudest and happiest guy in the State. He was actually *in love* with the boat; you could tell that from the way he looked at her.

About noon the shop telephone rang. Jenks answered it.

"Mr. Yenks," came a plaintive wail over the wire, audible for a dozen feet, "Ay bane stuck. She won't go any more."

"Where are you, Ole?"

"Ay bane at Newton. Mr. Yenks, why won't she go any more? You tank she broke?"

"No, I guess not, Ole. I'll send some one to fix you up."

Jenks told Jimmy Conway, one of his repair men, to ride a machine out to Newton, twenty miles away, and see what had struck Ole. Out of curiosity, and having nothing better to do, I went along on my own boat to keep Jim company.

We found the Swede sitting disconsolately on the saddle of his stalled bus. Jim wasted no time in asking questions, but rapped his knuckles against the gas-tank. It sounded hollow, and when he looked inside she was as dry as a Maine election.

"You poor simp!" Conway snorted. "You got me clear out here just to find your gas is used up."

Ole didn't say anything, but looked kind of mystified.

Jim took a section of rubber tubing from his kit, opened up his own gas-tank, ran the two machines close together, put one end of the tubing in his tank, and started to suck on the other end. When the juice came up to his mouth, Jim pinched the tube shut and put that end into Ole's tank. That is an easy way to siphon gas from one tank to another, but the fellow that starts the siphon to working usually gets his mouth full of gasoline.

"There," sputtered Conway, trying in vain to spit the taste out of his mouth. "Now your gosh darned old boat'll run. And for the love Mike, next time she stalls, see if you don't need gas before shooting out the S. O. S. signals. Use your bean."

"Why so peevish, Jimmy?" I put in. "Didn't you get more fun riding out here than you would grinding valves back in the shop?"

"Sure," he grunted; "but anything like that"—jerking a thumb at Ole—"just naturally cops my capricornus. What'll we do? Kill it or let it suffer?"

"Oh, let it suffer by all means," I says. "The agony process is going to give the rest of us a barrellful of innocent mirth."

Well, we left Ole there, after cautioning him that the gas we'd donated was only good for ten or a dozen miles. It was three by the time we got back to the shop, due to our having to fix a bad blow-out in Conway's rear casing.

"Watinell you guys do to Ole?" was the greeting Jenks fired at us. "He's just phoned in he's stuck again."

"'S a wonder that boob's got bean enough to use a telephone," muttered Jim. "There wasn't anything the matter but an empty gas-tank. You might say his think-tank was empty, too; but it wasn't. He just ain't got any, that's all."

"Oh, well," Jenks soothed him. "He's pretty green, I know; but the lad will come along all right. Give him time."

"I'll be giving him something a darned sight harder'n time if he don't start showing some intelligence," grumbled Conway. "Want me to chase him up again?"

Jenks nodded.

"He's only a few miles out on the new State road," he said.

So off we went. I wouldn't have missed being a member of the rescue party for ten simoleons. The more I cogitated, the surer I felt that Ole Swensen and his new motorcycle were going to add at least fifty per cent to the joy of life.

Presently we spotted the Swede up the road, cranking away at his motor. When we got there he was dripping, for it was a warm day.

"Ay can't make her go; Ay tank she broke," he told us, and there was a sobby catch in his voice.

All the time he kept spinning the motor as if some one was paying him for it.

"Hey stop it, you big cheese!" yelled Jim. "You can't start her that way; if she was right she'd fire at the first whirl."

"Mr. Yenks he say make her go like dis," and Ole continued to maul the starting system.

Conway grabbed him by the shoulder, and shoved him to one side out of the way. A rap at the gas-tank showed it to be full. Then he tested the ignition; each plug gave a husky, blue spark.

"That's darned funny," Jimmy muttered. "Her valve adjustment's O. K., too. Now what in the devil has he done to this poor old boat?"

He flooded the carb by holding up the tickling pin.

"Why, she's just *got* to start," says he, and kicked the motor over, but she didn't move.

Jim put his fingers under the dripping carb and got some of the juice on them; then he smelled of his fingers; then he looked over at me with the blamestest funny expression on his face you ever saw.

"Ole," he says to the bonehead, "where, oh, where in the lova Heaven did you get this gasoline?"

"I got him over dere," answers Ole proudly; and what do you suppose he pointed at? A watering trough by the roadside!

I never felt so happy in my life before. I just pranced over and hugged Ole; for a moment I was afraid I might kiss him, and I guess he was afraid of that, too, for he backed away some sudden.

"Ole," says I, wiping away the tears, "you're there, boy; you're there! And I'll buy you a candy cigar if you'll tell me how you came to think a motorcycle engine would run on water?"

"Ay see automobile fella fill his tank wid water yoost a leetle vile ago," and Ole glanced from Conway to me, and back to Conway.

His expression said plainer than words: "You bane pooty smart fellas, but Ay got you yoost the same."

Conway looked at me sorrowfully.

"We sure oughta kill it!" he said. "The poor simp saw some one fill a radiator, and now every watering trough along the road's a free gas station. Honest, we oughta kill it."

"Not while I'm around," I says. "It 'll suffer terribly, I know; but it 'd rather suffer than be dead."

Then we got busy on the stalled machine. If you know anything about gas engines, you realize how much trouble a little water in the gasoline will make. And this was worse; it was a little gas in a tankful of water.

We had to take the tank out of the frame and drain every last drop of liquid from it. Then we put it in the hottest patch of sunshine we could find to dry out, and after that the carb had to be dissected

and freed from the contaminating influence of H₂O.

The whole job took pretty close to an hour. When everything was O. K. again, Conway dug up his rubber tubing.

"Suppose you start the siphon," he says to me. "I haven't got the taste out of my mouth yet."

"Outside with that," I grinned. "Lemme give you an earful. We're doing it all for Ole, ain't we? Well, elect him the goat."

Conway reached over and grabbed me by the mitt.

"The drinks are on me," he says, "for not thinking of that myself."

Then he turned to the Swede.

"Listen, Ole," and he was as serious as a minister starting the marriage ceremony; "it's against the law to run a motorcycle on water, and besides it ain't done in our best families any more. Now we're going to get some gas from my tank into yours. Start sucking on this tube, but don't drink more'n a pint, because my supply's getting low."

Well, Ole would do absolutely anything you told him to—once. He began sucking like a thirsty elephant, and the lung-power he exhibited was sure astounding. I don't know how much gas he actually swallowed, but it was a good whiff; he was traveling so fast he just couldn't stop until a generous dose went down his intake-pipe.

Then — *whoof!* and likewise — *wow!* Those two eyes of Ole's bulged out like toy balloons, and, great shades of punctured tires, how he did spit!

"Hey there! Hava heart, Ole!" yells Conway, ducking away from the deluge. "I ain't got a raincoat on. That's what you get for trying to hog it. Didn't I tell you not to drink more'n pint? Why don't you use your bean?"

We tried to induce Ole to tackle the siphon business again; but nothing doing. He was real polite about it; thanked us and all that sort of thing, but the Angel Gabriel himself could never have made Ole trust his lips to that deadly little tube a second time.

"I'm cured!" said Ole in Scandinavian, or something that sounded like that.

In the end I did the job myself; I sucked mighty gently, and by good luck managed to start the siphon without getting more than a few drops of gas in my mouth. Even that little bit left a dark-brown taste

like the morning after for a couple of hours, so you can see what Ole was toting around with him the rest of the afternoon.

By night the news of Ole's exploits began to spread around. He rode in on the machine about eight o'clock, and the welcome the crowd gave him would make a victorious general's return home look like a pair of deuces.

Ole was real tickled; thought he must have done something downright clever. But for all the kidding they handed him—and some of it was pretty crude stuff—the friendly grin never faded from his homely face.

After a while he left, but came back in about ten minutes or so, pushing the boat along; she weighed close to three hundred pounds, too.

"What's the matter now, Ole?" asked one of the boys.

"She stop on me," sighed the owner. "Ay tank she broke dis time, sure."

We held a consultation to diagnose the case, but found no serious complications. The gasoline was shut off, that was all; and Ole hadn't had bean enough to turn it on. The motor ran a few hundred yards on the gas in the carb, and when that was sucked dry, quite naturally died.

You might be surprised that Ole knew enough to run a motorcycle at all, but the actual operation is simple enough for a seven-year-old boy to master.

"Some one's played a dirty trick on you, Ole," Jenks told him. "One of these here scallywags shut off your gas; turn it on and she'll run as good as ever."

But even while Ole was standing by the machine somebody shifted the magneto cables, so that each was hitched to the wrong cylinder. That little trick will fool even an experienced rider for a short time.

Poor Ole cranked and cranked, while the mob stood around donating advice. Finally Bud Adams—he had shifted the cables—said:

"Listen here, Ole; you don't say the right words. When a motor won't start, you have to shut your eyes and chant:

"Eeney, meeney, miney, mo;
Tickle the carb and away she'll go."

Ole was beginning to get just a little leary of free advice, but there wasn't anything he wouldn't try once. So he shut his innocent blue lamps and warbled:

"Aney, maney, miney, mo;
Tickle de carb an' away she go,"

real hopefully. While his eyes were closed,

Bud reached down and shifted the cables back. Ole gave a kick at the starting crank, and off she purred like a sweet little kitten.

"What did I tell you, Ole?" said Bud. "I guess I'm the guy that put the mote in motor."

Ole was considerably impressed; you could see that, but he didn't have anything to say; just straddled his bus and plugged off.

Next day we heard that a cop on Main Street sent in a hurry call for the bug wagon, after watching Ole trying to start his boat by the eeney, meeney, *et cetera*, method. Nothing seemed too crude for the poor simp to bite on.

One afternoon a lad was working on his motor in front of the shop with Ole standing near. All of a sudden he yells out so everybody heard:

"Say, Ole, go and ask Jim Conway for his left-hand monkey wrench, will ya? And hurry!"

"I lent it to Jake Brown, over to the Empire Garage," growls Conway. "I wish you'd go and get it." And off trots Ole to the Empire. Jake sent him to the Pyramid Garage, and the boys there told him it was at Daley's pumping shop.

After that we lost track of Ole's wanderings, but he went chasing all around town, with the left-handed wrench always keeping a lap to the good.

As time went on Ole began to develop into quite a speed fan. By chance he had got hold of a freak motor.

It's a peculiar thing about gas engines. A factory will run through a lot of a thousand motors, all exactly alike, and built up of parts that don't vary the hundredth of a hair. You'd naturally think that all the assembled motors would be identical, but not a bit of it.

Of course, most of 'em will be about the same, but here and there may be one that's not worth a plugged penny. And, on the other hand, a few may be so fast that you're ready to swear they're racing motors, and not stock at all.

Ole Swensen had picked up one of these last boats. Travel? Why there wasn't a stock machine in the region, of our make or any other, that had a look-in against her!

It didn't take Ole very long to discover that his bus could walk right along when you gave her the gas. His idea of bliss was to open the throttle till it jammed, and

then stick to the machine as long as he could.

The marvel of it was that he usually stuck to the finish. Although a horrible bonehead, he seemed to be a natural motorcycle rider. That was the only way to account for it.

The fellows began to have a little respect for Ole after trying to ride behind him for a few miles. We soon found out what was the matter—he simply didn't know the meaning of the word fear, and would go slithering around a curve at fifty per hour, while the experienced riders were glad to slow down to twenty-five or thirty. Anywhere and everywhere, Ole's Regal led the bunch.

But even the growing respect the fellows felt for the Swede couldn't prevent their putting it over on him in all sorts of ways. He was soon wise to most of the common tricks, but could always be depended on to rise at a new one like a hungry masca-longe.

Gradually, though, they eased up on him—that is, all but Jud Thompkins.

Jud rode a Tornado, but he hung around the Regal joint more than anywhere else; not that we gave him any encouragement, for he was just about as welcome as a dose of ivy poisoning. Jud was homely to look at, with his freckled face and red hair, and he assayed fully 99.90 per cent pure meanness.

His meanness came out in practical jokes which were usually about as funny as a pair of crutches; but Jud regarded himself as a true humorist. From his own account of it he had Montgomery and Stone fanned up into the backwoods, begging for help on bended knees.

Jud didn't try his stuff on regular members of the motorcycle crowd, for he knew well enough what would drop on him, and Jud Thompkins never went gunning for trouble; his yellow streak was wider than the Father of Waters in flood time.

But the way he opened up on poor Ole Swensen would make a potato weep. The best you could say about the line he pulled was that it was downright dirty.

One of Jud's favorites was to take the plugs out of Ole's motor, pinch the points together, and put them back. Then, of course, the boat wouldn't run.

Every so often he'd squirt the breaker-box of the mag full of oil, and after Ole got wise to that one, he began shooting

the oil in around the carbon brushes, so that they couldn't pick up any current from the revolving armature.

His most innocent stunt was to let the air out of tires and throw away the valve-caps. Once or twice we suspected him of using a short cut to deflation—an awl through the tire—but if Jud actually did that he was too careful of his precious self to get caught at it.

And Ole took all this without a whimper—never objected and never seemed to get mad. As long as he was satisfied, it was none of our funeral, but you bet we were getting horribly sick of Jud Thompkins.

"If Ole would only use his bean a little, he wouldn't let Jud slip it over on him so easy," sighed Jimmy Conway. "And if he only had a little pep to his backbone, the big stiff would knock Jud's head into the middle of next week. That feller's got an awful fall coming if it ever gets here, but I'm afraid it'll hit a short circuit on the way."

About that time Jud began crowing over the speed of his Tornado. He really did have some excuse for crowing, as she was a mighty fast boat. All of us tried a crack at him on the road, but it was no use, and Jud always managed to slip out of a speed test with Ole; an eel had nothing on him.

But finally he noticed that Ole's motor was falling off a bit. Her cylinder-heads had never been scraped, and both were well caked with carbon, which is mighty effective at knocking the zip out of a gas engine.

So he blew into the shop with his own bus all tuned up, fit as a fiddle, and began kidding Ole to race with him—right away, that afternoon.

Jenks put his car into the arrangements, because he knew Jud's game all the way through, and wanted time to tune up the Swede's machine. He was already losing some business on account of the Tornado beating so many of his Regals—though the latter was by far the better of the two machines—and he wanted to spill the beans.

Ole wouldn't listen to him, though; seemed keen to race.

"And how about a little bet on the side, Ole?" says Thompkins, seeing Ole was falling for his proposition. "Say ten bones?"

"Ya-as, Ay tank so," drawled Ole. "Ve'll let Mr. Yenks hold the money," and he peeled a ten-spot out of an old yellow wallet.

We tried to tell Ole how many kinds of a chump he was, but Ole's bone-headedness was only exceeded by one thing—his obstinacy—and there was nothing to do but adjourn to the one-mile speedway, at the edge of town, for the obsequies.

The track was used for both auto and motorcycle racing; and although it was nothing but a dirt course, the turns were banked so high that there was practically no limit to the speed possibilities.

The race was to be for ten miles, flying start; and it ended exactly as we had all known it would. Jud romped around in a few seconds under ten flat, almost lapping the Swede.

As a race it was one melancholy fizzle. Poor Ole seemed terribly disappointed; it was the first time his machine had ever been beaten; but somehow I couldn't get out of my head the thought that he hadn't pushed the bus, in spite of the condition she was in, up to the limit.

And Jud Thompkins? He certainly did puff out like a corpulent alderman. He more than rubbed it in, believe me!

We learned later that Smith, the local Tornado dealer, had promised Jud fifty dollars the day he cleaned up Ole's machine.

"Don't want to try it again, do you, Ole?" he asked finally. "I'll take you on for any proposition you make."

That made me suspicious, for everybody knew that Ole's motor could beat the Tornado, after she'd been tuned up a bit.

"Y-as, Ay tank so," drawled Ole.

"Good! You're a regular sport, Ole, and that's more'n I can say about some other parties around here. Fifty dollars too rich for your blood?"

But the Swede shook his blond head in disapproval.

"Ay tank 'bout five hunder dollar," struck Jud—*bing!* right in the face between his shifty eyes.

He was fairly staggered. Five hundred was a little rich for *his* blood, but the whole crowd, Regal and Tornado fans alike, had heard his offer, and there was no chance for even an honest-to-goodness four-flusher like Jud Thompkins backing down then.

"You're on, Ole," he says, but most of Jud's enthusiasm had oozed into the great beyond.

The money was put up that night, and

conditions for the race arranged for. It was to be held on Saturday afternoon, two weeks away, and each man was bound to ride his own machine.

The first thing Jenks did was to tell Ole to leave his motorcycle at the shop for a general overhauling and tuning up.

"It won't cost you a cent, Ole," he said, "but you've just got to beat that pest of a Thompkins."

"Ya-as, Ay tank so, too," drawled Ole, as usual.

But the next week the Swede didn't bring his machine around to the shop, nor the week following. In fact, he didn't come near the place at all.

Jenks was wild.

"What's the matter with the poor fish?" he raved. "Does he think he knows more about tuning up a motor for a race than we do?"

"It's just what I've been saying right along," put in Conway, his face as long as an undertaker's. "The poor simp never uses his bean. He doesn't know enough to know his motor's full of carbon; and he doesn't know the kind of stuff Jud 'll pull off to win."

"Why, that guy would sell his soul for five hundred seeds, if anybody was fool enough to want it. Why, Thompkins 'd rather cop the race crooked than straight, as a matter of principle. His trail's so darned crooked it's a wonder he don't meet himself coming back."

Ole seemed to have dropped out completely, for we couldn't even find him at his boarding-house. Bud Adams saw him on the street one night two days before the race, but the Swede ducked out of sight before Bud could get to him. It began to look as if he wanted to lose the five hundred.

The news of the race, with the big side bet, got around pretty generally, and that Saturday afternoon there was a big crowd out at the track. It was to be for ten miles, as before, but this time best two out of three to win.

When our bunch got there Ole was already on hand, standing beside his motor. And he was watching the boat like a hawk. For once, at least, Jud's crooked work would not include tampering with Ole's carb or magneto.

Jenks was pretty sore at Ole for not doing as he had been told, but he was right on the job to see that the Swede got

a fair show. And when he lamped the bus Jud was going to ride he went up into the blue empyrean like a scared biplane.

A Tornado racing engine had been put in the frame of Jud's machine; we all recognized it as one that Smith had had in his shop for a couple of years. While it was slow for a racing motor—not in the same class with a Regal racer—no ordinary stock engine would stand a ghost of a chance against it.

"You don't ride that machine, Jud," said our boss.

"Who told you to horn into this, anyway?" retorted Thompkins, blowing a cloud of cheap cigarette-smoke into Jenks's face. "And let me give you an earful, old top; I *am* going to ride this machine! That goes! See?"

"According to the signed conditions for the race, you must each ride your own machine," Jenks continued, trying not to get mad. "Ole's riding his, and you've got to do the same."

"Who said that wasn't his motor?" growled Smith, joining the fray. "There's no law against me selling Jud that motor, is there? And there's no law against his taking the stock motor out of the frame and putting this one in its place, is there?"

"So that's the way you two crooks have framed it up, eh?" and our boss was pretty hot. "And of course there's no law against his selling it back as soon as the race is over, either!"

The crooked work was as plain as a spike in a tire, but there appeared no way to break it up.

Of course, that motor was not really Jud's; but if Smith and he both declared it was, we could do nothing. Possibly Jud had bought it—for about five dollars; it was easily worth thirty times that amount—but if so, as Jenks said, he would be selling it back right after the race.

The Tornado crowd was mighty cocky. They came around, waving money in our faces, hungry for bets, but didn't scare up any takers.

We didn't see any chances of winning against stacked cards. The odds offered went from two to one up to five, and at last to ten.

Conway could stand it no longer.

"Give me twenty-five dollars' worth of that," he grunted. "Ole's a terrible simp, but there's something here I don't under-

stand, and I'll take a ten to one shot on most anything."

Meanwhile Jenks had been telling Ole in words of one syllable just what that racing Tornado would do to him, but Ole didn't seem to be worrying a whole lot.

"She'll make seventy an hour at least, Ole," Jenks pleaded; but all the Swede did was to bite off a fresh chew of tobacco.

And he would not refuse to ride, protesting Jud's machine, as Jenks wanted him to. Yet, when Ole rode around the track for a warming up spin, there was something in the zippy bark of his unmuffled motor that made me prick up my ears. Then I took counsel with my roll and covered a few bets at juicy odds.

Well, the race was just as much a fizzle as the one before, but the other way. There was really nothing to describe about it. The Tornado did its seventy an hour, all right, all right, but that Regal of Ole's just naturally snorted around at better than seventy-five.

They didn't need to ride the third event, because Ole cleaned up on the first two.

And maybe things didn't blow up some as Ole roared over the finish the second time, that good old motor of his spitting fire like a machine-gun in a trench, Thompkins more than three hundred yards behind. Man, dear, but the fireworks were glorious!

We fell on Ole, pounded him on the back, told him what a wonder he was, and a lot more; it was quite different treatment than that he had been accustomed to. And it was sure worth a lot of lucre to see how sick that Tornado bunch looked, Thompkins especially.

Ole had certainly sent Jud's chickens home to roost, and there wasn't any welcome on the door-mat when they flitted in, either.

Then all of a sudden I happened to look closely at Ole's motor, and a great light dawned.

It looked like his motor, but then again it didn't. The cylinder-heads seemed to have grown some, but the engine itself was surely Ole's original power plant. We all had been too hot at Jud to look twice at the Regal, never expecting any change there.

At last we got it straight.

Jud's poor brand of humor had been rankling in Ole's soul until he was fair sick for a come-back. He had accepted

the first challenge, knowing that he would surely lose. For the second meet he had counted on Jud's trying to work in the racing motor, and knew that his boat couldn't hold it, even in her best condition.

So what does he do but ride to the Regal factory—four hundred miles away—and tell them the whole story. The best speed doctors in all that immense plant started to work on Ole's motor. She was fast to begin with, but when they had finished with her she was nothing short of chain lightning.

They fitted special cylinder-heads to take oversize valves, increased the valve-lift by adding racing cams, drilled the pistons and connecting rods to make them lighter and so give greater speed to the

engine, adjusted the timing and carb for speed work, and so on.

In fact, they converted a stock motor into an extra snappy racer, and if you've followed the game I don't need to tell you what the Regal racing boats can do. Of course, any well built machine could be fixed up in the same way, but racing motorcycles aren't much good for ordinary service, and the stock machines have speed enough for all ordinary requirements.

"But how did you dope it all out, Ole?" asked Conway, with something like awe in his voice.

Ole's blue eyes smiled, and one of his eyelids drooped just the tiniest bit as he answered:

"Ay tank Ay use ma bean."



I.

GRAYSON had now seen the girl for the third time. For three consecutive days he had passed her in his roadster, she in a smart phaeton.

The first time there was a momentary exchange of glances, hers indifferent, Grayson's ardent. A little too ardent, perhaps, for the following day she drove by with her chin in the air and eyes ahead.

And now she had just passed for the third time, never deigning to look back.

Grayson stopped the machine and turned his head. Down the lonely country road about a quarter of a mile from where he was he saw the phaeton swerve to the right,

watched it moving up a carriage drive until it was lost from view behind a row of thick trees.

"So we're neighbors," he told himself, "and she lives in the big mansion."

"Neighbors!" He repeated the word and laughed. He and she and her family, if she had one, were the only people in the country around for a distance of half a mile.

He had just rented a small cottage a stone's throw down the road, because the country was quiet and the cottage isolated from other dwellings. He had come to the place a stranger, so the outlook for an introduction was not encouraging.

When he reached home Hadley, his

butler, with beaming face, informed him that there was a visitor inside.

"Don't stand there like a chump," Grayson bellowed. "Is it a man or woman?"

Hadley's countenance instantly assumed a serious expression.

"A man, sir. Mr. Burton just came."

And Mr. Burton just then walked from the doorway of the cottage, saluting Grayson with a cheery smile.

"I thought I heard the old buzz-wagon," he said. "Do get out and stay a while."

"Tommy, you come like an angel from Heaven," Grayson laughed as he wrung his friend's hand. "It's so lonely here that I am half sorry I took the cottage."

"Why half?"

Grayson looked around. Hadley appeared to be deeply interested in the mechanism of the automobile.

His master grabbed Burton's arm.

"Come inside. I'll explain."

Grayson's mysterious manner began to excite Burton's curiosity.

"Fire away," he said as soon as they were indoors.

"The fact is," began Grayson, "I'm in love."

Burton sat upright in his chair, a startled look on his face. Then his head went back and he roared. Suddenly his gaiety subsided.

"Is that why you came up here, Bob, to er—get away from unpleasant memories?"

"The memories, Tom, have just begun. I have seen her three times. Don't know who she is and can't figure out how I am going to meet her. But I'll give you the story from the start."

Thereupon Grayson related his meetings with the unknown girl while Burton listened attentively.

When Grayson finished the other whistled.

"I know something of the young lady. She is Marion Mawbrey. Her father is Silas Mawbrey, a man of wealth but rather eccentric ideas. His wife died several years ago. The daughter has recently graduated from a private school. Along with her diploma she acquired a craze to become a moving picture actress, but the old man, I understand, put his foot down on it hard."

"How do you know this?"

Burton smiled.

"You remember the Harrison girls who live in Philadelphia. They went to the

same school with Marion Mawbrey. You know Alice Harrison and I are quite chummy and the last time I saw Alice in Philly I remember she spoke of this Marion Mawbrey."

"But are you sure, Tom, it's the same girl?"

"Positive. I recall the name of the town Alice said the Mawbreys lived in and also the description of the house. I am certain I am not mistaken. If you like I could get Alice to write a letter to—"

Grayson interrupted him.

"It would not do, Tom. It would look as though I were seeking an introduction in a—well, you know a round-about fashion."

"That's so, but then what's to be done? The father has cooped her up, she's never been out, she has still the agony of a debut ahead of her, and—"

Burton stopped abruptly, banging a fist on the arm of his chair.

"By George, I have it, we'll become movie men for a day!"

"Movie men for a day?" gasped Grayson. "Look here, Tom Burton, I'm serious. Why josh?"

Burton did not heed the remark. With his eyes looking over Grayson's head, he sat with an air of concentration that caused the other to turn.

"And we can use Hadley," exclaimed Burton. "Oh, Bob, this will be rich."

Burton jumped up, thrust his hands into his pockets and pivoted on his heels. Grayson looked at him as though he had gone mad.

"And you will be the lover," continued the enthusiastic conceiver of ideas, "I the director and Hadley the crank turner."

This was too much for Grayson.

"Will you kindly explain what you are talking about?" he demanded.

Hadley at this point entered the room carrying a tray containing bottles and glasses. As soon as he had set it down Burton grabbed the butler by the arm.

"Hadley, have you ever turned a crank, something that goes around?"

Burton illustrated with his hand, passing it in a circle while the butler watched him with an amazed expression.

"Did you ever grind coffee?" Burton went on.

"Yes, sir; no, sir. That is, I have turned a crank, as you say. Sometimes on Mr. Grayson's automobile, sir."

Burton chuckled.

"Your experience has been varied," he remarked. "You're engaged."

By this time Grayson's look had become one of despair.

"If you are going to use my butler, Tom Burton, for one of your crazy notions, and perhaps get him into jail, it will be—"

"It will be experience for him," finished Burton. "He is to become our star operator. He will turn the crank of a dummy moving picture machine. Leave the rest to me."

"But the idea, man," persisted Grayson. "What in the name of common sense is all this rot about?"

Hadley, whose curiosity was aroused, stood waiting for orders. Excitement and fun of some kind were brewing, and Mr. Burton, whose "ideas" he had seen worked out in the city time and time again, in escapades that had found their way into the New York newspapers, was just the man to start it.

"The idea—" began Burton.

Grayson held up his hand.

"I'll call if I want you, Hadley."

The butler took the hint and somewhat reluctantly left the room.

"The idea," proceeded Burton, "is simple, but it will take nerve. However, the result will be well worth the risk. You will meet the lady of the phaeton; she, I am sure, will consent to do what is requested of her; you will have an opportunity to make love; she will be quick to note your non-curious disposition and good looks, with the result of a romance, perhaps a wedding, and I, for all my trouble, elected best man. But it will take nerve."

"You said that twice," growled Grayson. "It will take the form of insanity, I'm thinking."

Burton did not heed the taunt, but continued.

"To-morrow you, Hadley and I will visit the Mawbrey house. In my wallet I happen to have a card with Franklin Payne's name on it. He is a director of the Continental Film Company. I don't believe you know him. Perhaps he would object to what I intend to do, but where love is concerned there is no time for conscience or compunction. I will present the card to Miss Mawbrey. I am to be a moving picture director, you my leading man, Hadley my operator, and—"

"Stop right where you are," Grayson

broke in. "Of all the wild and outlandish schemes that you have at times executed this is positively—"

But Burton refused to be overruled.

"Positively the most original and daring," he cut in. "Wait and hear me out. My desire will be to use the spacious grounds around her house for a scene. I will tell her that being in a hurry I will not have the time to send to the studio for a young girl who is to play a love scene with you. Immediately I suggest that she make a try at it. She will jump at the chance, believe me, and when you get to know her well—confessions. Those to be made, of course, when I am far away."

Grayson listened with an absorbed air.

"But her father, Tom?" Grayson objected. "Surely he would—"

Burton smiled.

"Since you've become a hermit you do not read the papers carefully. Silas Mawbrey has been in Washington for the past week. There he will remain on a business mission for at least one week more."

"But suppose she has relatives or friends at the house," Grayson again objected; "perhaps some one who would know this Payne, why—"

Burton held up his hand.

"You say you've always seen her alone. Of course, Bob, if you are afraid, we'll bottle the whole business."

To Grayson's clear mind the scheme, while daring, was fascinating. The temptation to meet the girl of whom he had grown to think so much was irresistible.

Grabbing Burton's hand he shook it heartily.

"I'm with you, Tommy, for better or worse."

"For better, my boy, for better," remarked the philosophical Burton. "Don't think of failure."

II.

THE following morning bright and early Burton was up and around the cottage. Grayson was still sleeping, dreaming of the girl of the phaeton and goblins turning coffee grinders, when he was suddenly awakened by a loud noise.

For a second he listened. The din increased. Jumping up he went to the window.

Below he saw Burton sitting on a chair hammering away at a square wooden box.

Burton suddenly looked up.

"Our camera," he grinned. "Like it?"

Grayson laughed. There was something irresistible about Burton.

"Go back to bed," advised the self-appointed director. "After I paint it black I'll call you."

"No, I'm up for good. Perhaps you had better let me help you."

Burton shook his head.

"You know the story about too many cooks."

Grayson left the window to dress. He felt in gay spirits. Burton's plan had taken hold of him. It would surely be a lark and possibly a romance.

A knock came on the door. Grayson threw it open to find Hadley, a frightened look on his face.

"I thought it best to tell you, sir. Mr. Burton took your large oaken box, sir, the one you keep cigars in, and he has been hammering nails into it all morning, sir."

Grayson smiled.

"That's all right, Hadley, never mind."

"But he wants the handle off the victrola now, sir, and when I tried to explain that you needed it, he said he wouldn't let me be his star operator, sir, whatever he means by that."

Grayson was beginning to enjoy the situation.

"Let him have that, too, Hadley. Perhaps we'll get it back if we're lucky."

The butler disappeared. Grayson shook his head. Burton was a genius for originality.

Down-stairs in the foyer hall Grayson met the excited Hadley again.

"He wants some of the washers off the plumbing, sir. He says it would not look like the real thing without some brass or tin on it, sir. You'd better stop him, sir," beseeched the butler, "before he breaks up the house."

"Can you get the washers, Hadley?"

"I can take some off, Mr. Grayson, but it will ruin the plumbing."

"All right, do it."

Hadley looked at his master. Like Burton, he, too, seemed half mad. The fun that Hadley had anticipated seemed to be developing into the breaking up of the cottage.

Outside Grayson came upon Burton smoking a cigarette. Beside him on the ground in the full rays of the sun stood a peculiar looking dark box, freshly painted, with a handle projecting from the side.

"My cigar box," laughed Grayson.

"The same," rejoined Burton, "only disguised. Hadley, I'm afraid, imagines I've gone mad. Before you came down he was watching me like a hawk."

"You have not told him, then?"

Burton winked.

"Not yet. Before we leave I'll give him final instructions. It will be simple. His will be a thinking part."

Hadley came from the house with several washers which he handed to Grayson, who in turn gave them to Burton.

Without a word Tommy selected several tacks and proceeded to hammer the washers on to the box, while the butler looked on with an air of astonishment.

Finishing the job, Burton glanced up.

"By the way, Bob," he asked, "have you a camera lense and a tripod?"

Grayson nodded.

"Then we're all right. The job's through and the paint on the box will be dry in the course of a few hours."

Grayson smiled.

"Where did you get your plan for the thing, Tommy?" he asked.

"I saw a moving-picture machine once," Burton grinned. "Big memory, great head. Come on, let's have breakfast."

III.

FOUR hours later, after the two friends had lunched, Burton called Hadley into the room. The butler knew that the time had now come when he was to be enlightened on the mysterious proceedings of the forenoon.

"Hadley," began Burton, "with Mr. Grayson's consent you will do something for me. If you do it well a ten dollar bill will pass from my hand into yours."

Hadley smiled.

"If you bungle the job," continued Burton, "may your sin be forgiven."

Hadley looked perplexed, but waited for further orders.

"In one hour from now, Hadley, you will be ready dressed in a sack-suit and a cap. You will carry a camera tripod and that box you saw which looks like a cross between a moving picture machine and a combination of household utilities."

The language was too deep for Hadley, but he took it for granted that Burton was right.

"That is all, Hadley. Later I will give you final instructions."

The butler left the room much bewildered and wondering where it was all going to end.

Burton turned to Grayson.

"I have something very important to do," he said, "for I am about to make up the scenario of the play."

Grayson laughed.

"You might advertise yourself as the Tommy Burton Film Company, Inc.," he suggested. "Director, manager and scenario writer, to say nothing of prop man and carpenter."

"After I outline the scenario, Bob, you might add matchmaker to that long line of titles, and for Heaven's sake don't bungle the whole business when you start to make love to this girl."

Grayson looked worried.

"I'm just beginning to realize what I have undertaken," he said. "You know I'm no actor, and Miss Mawbrey possibly knows less about the art than I do."

"You don't need to be an actor," was the reassuring reply. "Any fellow that has the case you have will find it comes natural. Have you ever made love to a girl?"

Burton put the question with such directness that Grayson jumped.

"Has that anything to do with it?"

"Surely. Experience always counts. For instance when you say the line 'Will you be mine' what are you going to do when you say it?"

Grayson winced.

"Look here, Tommy, I'm afraid I'll get cold feet."

"No, you won't. You can't back out now, Bob. The scene won't take long. I've watched Payne direct his company, and inasmuch as our affair is only make believe I promise you it will be over quickly. The girl will be standing near a tree when you meet her. You converse. Expressions show mutual love and the scene ends with her in your arms."

"But what if she objects to the whole thing?"

"She won't. I am telling you she will jump at the chance. Trust me for carrying this thing through."

Burton looked at his watch. Then he banged a fist into the palm of his hand.

"Great Scott, we forgot make-up. You know we must have make-up to appear genuine."

Grayson whistled.

"The scheme's off," he said.

"Not by a long shot," Burton flung back at him as he started for the door. "You wait here. I'm going to the village in your car. I'll get the make-up somewhere."

As the door closed after Burton Grayson sank into a chair.

"Faint heart never won fair lady," he murmured.

IV.

AN hour later Grayson's roadster started slowly up the road toward the Mawbrey house, with Burton at the wheel. Beside him sat Grayson, elaborately made up, with an expression on his face as though he was going to his own funeral. Behind on foot followed Hadley in sack-suit and cap, carrying Burton's home-made non-registering moving-picture machine in his arms and final instructions in his dazzled brain.

At the entrance to the Mawbrey ground Burton stopped the machine. When the butler reached them he turned to him with:

"Don't forget, Hadley, you are not to open your mouth. Do what I tell you and try to look natural."

The machine then started on toward the house. On the porch Grayson saw Marion rise from a chair and put aside a magazine she had been reading. He noted the puzzled expression on her face as she watched their approach.

Burton must have seen it, too, for he turned and whispered, "Steady now. She won't recognize you, and if she does it's no harm."

Burton stopped the machine in front of the porch and jumped out. Resting his foot carelessly on one of the steps, he took Payne's card from his wallet.

Marion Mawbrey waited patiently, while Grayson, overcome with stage fright, sat speechless in the machine, not daring to move.

Burton removed his hat and ascended the steps.

"I don't know whether you are the person I should see," he said with his most engaging smile as he gave her the pasteboard. "If not perhaps you could advise me."

Marion glanced at the card. Her indifferent manner suddenly changed. Extending her hand she said, "I am very glad to meet you, Mr. Payne. Won't you come up and sit down?"

Burton's eye fell upon the magazine she had been reading. He could see something

on the cover about motion pictures. The game was now in his hands and he meant to play it for all it was worth.

"First permit me to introduce Mr. Grayson, my leading man," he said.

Bob had left the machine and was centering his attention upon the radiator when Burton spoke. Turning, he looked directly into Marion Mawbrey's eyes.

She returned the gaze, her color deepening. If she recognized him she showed no signs.

"Another pleasure, Mr. Grayson," was all she said.

Bob bowed and moved towards the steps.

Hadley had found a comfortable seat on the running-board on the other side of the machine and leisurely proceeded to light one of Grayson's good cigars, feeling that the adventure so far was not to be taken seriously.

"We were just passing, Miss—er—" Burton purposely waited, professing ignorance of her name.

"How stupid of me!" she laughed. "Why, here you gentlemen introduce yourselves and I forgot to return the compliment. My name is Marion Mawbrey."

Again Grayson and Burton bowed.

"We were passing," resumed Burton, "and I was attracted by the beauty of the scenery about the house."

"It is beautiful, isn't it?" she agreed.

"So attractive," went on Burton, "that I could not resist stopping. The fact is, I have a scene I want to take to-day and the grounds in front here would be the ideal spot for it."

Burton paused. He saw the look of enthusiasm on the girl's face. The iron was hot and he meant to strike.

"The very spot," he continued, "but the scene will be played by Mr. Grayson and one of the girls from the studio. I'm afraid by the time I could get her out here the best part of the afternoon would be gone."

Grayson looked at Burton. Truly Tommy was a natural born fabricator, for never did language flow in a more unconcerned manner.

"However," Burton proceeded, "my object in calling was to get permission to film a scene on the grounds."

He looked toward Marion and waited.

"I am sure you have that," she said. "I am also sorry you can't do it to-day. You know I have never seen a picture taken."

Burton now decided to take the bull by the horns. Her admission that she knew nothing about the filming of pictures urged him on.

"I was wondering, Miss Mawbrey," he said, speaking slowly and knitting his brows as though he had not already figured out just what he was going to say. "The scene will be short. The girl, of course, has not the leading part and does not appear throughout the scenario. She is in fact screened once."

Marion's eyes glistened. Burton saw the expression and knew that her woman's intuition was at work.

"Well," she asked, "what were you wondering?"

"Just this. Would you care to play the scene?"

"But, Mr. Payne," she stammered, "I have never—"

Burton interrupted her.

"I know you are going to tell me you have never acted. But the part requires no experience. Of course it counts, but does not bulk large in the plot. Why, Miss Mawbrey, I have seen girls like yourself start in and—well some have shown talent right at the beginning."

Grayson could not repress a smile. Of all the cheerful liars Tommy Burton was in a class by himself.

"If you think I would do," she said hesitatingly, "why—"

Burton applied his finishing touches.

"Of that I have no doubt. Come, let's get down to business."

Receiving her permission, they both smoked. Burton a cigarette, Grayson his pipe.

The pipe seemed to arouse Grayson's conversational powers. For the past five or ten minutes he had barely said a word, fearing he might spoil matters.

"Of course you can do it, Miss Mawbrey," he said. "The part is small, isn't it, Tommy?"

In a flash he saw a warning expression come over Burton's face. He, Grayson, had made his first break, and fumbled a name. Luckily she did not notice.

"Very small," assented Burton, "and then, of course, Miss Mawbrey, Mr. Grayson's experience will help you. Won't it, Bob?"

Grayson stirred uneasily in his chair. Marion shot him an admiring look.

"What? Oh, yes, to be sure," he agreed.

Burton now called Hadley, who had remained seated on the running board with the stoicism of an Indian.

"Bring the make-up box," he directed.

Hadley reached into the machine and produced the box Burton had purchased in the village. Tommy opened it, took out the necessary requisites and advised Marion how to make up as well as his limited knowledge permitted him to do.

She accepted the articles like a child receiving a new toy.

"You know, I have never used these either, Mr. Payne."

"You'll have no trouble," Burton assured her. "The costume you are wearing is just the thing."

When she had disappeared indoors, Grayson turned to Burton.

"Of all the ready liars," he began, "you certainly—"

"Yes, and of all the boneheads," Burton hissed, "you are the worst; calling me Tommy. Call me Franklin, or Frank, or Frankie, if you will; the name must correspond with the card."

Grayson took his pipe from his mouth.

"I hope you'll never meet a girl in a phaeton, Tommy," he gasped. "If I had to do this for you I'd cave in before I was half way through."

Five minutes later Marion reappeared.

"And how does it look?" she asked.

"Splendid!" commented Burton, "actually bully."

In fact, both he and Grayson were surprised, for she had applied just enough make-up, and had done it carefully.

As they started down the steps Grayson placed his pipe on the rail of the porch, an act which was to be responsible for one of the most exciting adventures he had ever experienced in his young life.

His stage fright had now disappeared, and the near presence of the girl he now knew he loved made him ready for anything. Marion, too, seemed in gay spirits.

Burton stopped them about two hundred feet from the house.

"Let us film it here," he said. "First we'll have rehearsal. The idea, Miss Mawbrey," he explained in the patronizing tone he had heard Payne use, "is to show happiness when Mr. Grayson appears. You will lean against this tree in a dreamy fashion. You are waiting for Rudolph, who is Mr. Grayson. When he appears you converse. He implores you to fly with him. You con-

sent, and the scene ends with you in his arms."

Marion blushed and looked shyly at Grayson, whose mind kept repeating the name "Rudolph."

"How on earth did Burton come to pick the name Rudolph for a romantic one," he asked himself. "No doubt he will forget and make it something else next time."

Marion had taken her position against the tree. Burton held up his hand.

"You can make up your own words, both of you," he said; "it's the expression I want. Ready."

Marion leaned against the tree with a faraway look in her eyes. She remembered having seen heroines do that in the pictures, and thought it quite proper to do now.

"Bully!" ejaculated Burton. "Now, Miss Mawbrey, you hear Randolph's approach."

"I thought so," muttered Grayson, under his breath. "I'm Randolph now."

"You listen," continued Burton; "that's it; fine. Now you see him. Ready, Rudolph, enter."

Grayson, whose natural manner made up for his lack of acting ability, walked into the scene.

"I have waited long," he said, his voice low and musical, "for this chance."

His earnestness surprised Marion, but then Mr. Grayson, she reflected, was a star, and undoubtedly put his soul into his work.

"And now that you have the chance?" She fairly breathed the words as a strange sensation seemed to thrill her. She felt Grayson's magnetic personality.

"I am going to tell you," he murmured, "what has been in my heart."

Burton kept quiet. If the expressions on their faces could have been recorded, they would have been pronounced perfect.

For a second Grayson looked into her eyes. And with that look came courage.

He would not act with her. No, everything he did and said he would feel, regardless of the presence of his friend and the butler.

"Patience has its reward," he whispered, "and I see now what I tried to know before."

She felt the blood rushing to her cheeks. "And what is that?" Her voice was barely audible.

"That even as I loved you, you, too, would love me. Ah, I know," his voice in-

flected with a rapture that thrilled her, "that I have found you and that you are mine, now and always. I want you if you will have me."

He opened his arms and she nestled against his shoulder. Lowering his head he whispered, "Marion."

Somewhere from the folds of his coat came a faint "Bob."

It was too low for even Burton to hear. But Grayson heard and his blood tingled.

"That's great," Tommy declared. "Really remarkable on your part, Miss Mawbrey. Of course I expected something like that from Mr. Grayson," he finished with a mischievous glance at Bob which she did not see.

Marion's cheeks were still red and her eyes bright.

"Do you think we did it well enough?" she asked timidly.

"I venture to say it could not be improved. I'm half sorry I did not have the camera on it."

Burton had become so obsessed with his ready lying that for a second he was half believing his regret.

Turning now to the patient Hadley, he said, "We are ready."

Hadley placed the box on top of the stand and waited with his hand on the crank. To an experienced eye, or even to one that had ever seen a moving-picture machine, Burton's home-made contrivance bore but a slight resemblance to the real article. As he said himself later, it looked more like a miniature model of a new kind of submarine with a periscope projecting from its side, but to Marion, whose mind was not on the machine at all, it passed inspection.

She took her position by the tree, her brain a-whirl and her heart a-flutter. Grayson, several yards away, watched her with a rapt expression, while Burton, whose enthusiasm over the scheme was keyed to its highest pitch, almost believed for the minute that he was a sure enough director.

"Ready," he called, remembering what Payne said, "Camera."

Hadley began turning as he watched Burton like a hawk. The remark about the ten dollars was still in his mind and he knew that the time had now come to earn it.

Grayson again entered the scene, going through his part. His master's ardor surprised Hadley, who forgot for the moment

to turn the handle, until his duty was brought forcibly to mind by a back kick from Burton's shoe. Hadley thereupon began turning at the rate of five hundred revolutions to the minute, believing that the faster he turned the better it suited the "director."

At the end of the scene as Grayson enfolded Marion in his arms, the four of them suddenly jumped as the honk, honk, of an automobile horn sounded down at the entrance to the grounds. Marion came out of her dream, Grayson muttered something about "darned invention of noises," and Burton, who was the first to spy the machine coming slowly up the drive, almost collapsed.

Even at the short distance he saw and realized what was impending. His quick brain was needed now more than ever, for the big automobile rolling up the drive contained five men and a woman, four of them with make-up on their faces. One man drove the machine, while another, who appeared to be the leader of the party, was holding a life size regulation moving-picture machine in front of him.

Grayson foresaw the sting of impostor being branded upon him, and his heart sank. Just when everything was going far better than he had dared hope comes this interruption.

Turning to Marion Burton whispered, "Undoubtedly another moving picture company, Miss Mawbrey. I'll see if I know them."

Tommy did not mean to lose out now. He would bluff the newcomers even stronger than he had Marion. His salvation lay in none of them happening to know Payne.

Grabbing Hadley by the arm he whispered, "Take that confounded box and throw it into the bushes."

Then turning he advanced to meet a hard-faced man who had left the automobile and was walking toward him.

Burton noted the look of surprise on his face as he observed Marion and Grayson in their make-up. For a second he seemed to hesitate and in that second Burton decided that he should take the initiative.

The newcomer bowed.

"My name is Trent," he began as he passed Burton a card. "Ira Trent of the Merrick Film Company."

Burton glanced at the card. Just as he had expected, this man was the director.

But he seemed rather an uncouth specimen. Undoubtedly it was some cheap company and possibly he had never heard of Payne.

"And I represent the Continental," Burton rejoined. "Glad to meet you."

"We're from Chicago," Trent announced. "Hit Manhattan yesterday. Orders from Chi to get New York atmosphere on a picture I'm taking."

Burton nodded. Courtesy demanded that he introduce Marion and Bob. He felt no explanation was due Trent about the Tommy Burton Film Company, Inc. If Trent asked questions it would be different. Tommy felt it would be time enough to cross the bridge when he came to it.

Turning to Marion he introduced Trent, whose eyebrows arched when he heard her name. No doubt he had heard of her.

Marion acknowledged the introduction with a bow. Burton was quick to see that Trent did not impress her, and Grayson realized that she viewed his presence as an intrusion. Both of them observed, though, that she was handling the situation delicately.

After he had been made acquainted with Grayson Trent got down to business.

"The grounds," he explained, "attracted me as I was passing, Miss Mawbrey. My picture calls for one particular scene, and I would deem it a favor if I could film it here. I promise not to take long."

Despite Trent's rough manner he had a glib tongue. He also possessed a protruding, obstinate jaw, and Marion felt that under the circumstances his request was no more unusual than was Burton's. Again, too, she was no exception to the woman's trait of making a man jealous, and as she stole a side-long glance at Grayson's face and saw the look of annoyance there she made up her mind.

Trent noted her look of indecision. He was a trifle mystified at seeing her made up, but decided that she was no doubt a friend of the supposed Continental director, who was trying her out for the pictures.

He became a trifle more aggressive.

"With your consent, Miss Mawbrey," he said, "I'll call my operator."

Burton and Grayson waited. It was for Marion to object, but she made no move.

Trent called the others from the machine.

Trent introduced the three actors, but what their names were neither Burton nor Grayson remembered.

Suddenly Trent snapped his fingers. He had taken a typewritten scenario from his pocket and was reading it.

"The scene calls for several servants," he explained. "A chauffeur and a gardener. I had not intended taking it to-day or would have brought another machine with extras. But I hate to miss this sunshine."

The look of disappointment on his face touched Marion.

Trent went on:

"Would it be asking too much, Miss Mawbrey if I used one or two of your servants? The parts are practically entrances and exits."

Marion smiled. What if her father found out that his daughter had posed for moving pictures? To her it was a lark and perhaps something else. But the servants—

"We have a gardener," she said, "but our chauffeur is in New York for a few days while father is away."

"You have several women domestics?"

Trent put the question in a casual way.

"My maid and the cook," replied Marion. "The waitress is away on a visit."

"We won't need her." Trent was taking it for granted that matters were arranged. "While we get things ready would you please get the ones you spoke of?"

Marion nodded and turned to Grayson, who accompanied her to the house, where he waited on the porch while she went inside for the two servants. On the way they had met the gardener, who was informed of the doings and went down on the lawn to join the group of picture people.

Marion reappeared with the two girls, both flushed with excitement. They looked at Grayson with rapturous glances as they followed him and their mistress down the steps.

Trent saw the four coming and beckoned.

"Everything's ready," he called out, "the girls are just in time."

With the hand of an expert he made them up. The space had been cleared and the camera set. Holding the manuscript Trent gave instructions to his leading man, who nodded his head but said nothing.

Grayson had taken a cordial dislike to this fellow, and in fact to the whole crowd. They certainly were ordinary, but fortunately held themselves aloof and had little to say.

Burton and Marion watched with interest as Trent began the scene. What it was all about Grayson did not know and cared

less. He wondered why Trent did not use his own chauffeur, who sat in the machine and suddenly started to amuse himself by sounding the horn.

Trent turned and said something to him in a low voice which no one heard. The chauffeur nodded and desisted with his tooting.

For about five minutes, or perhaps a little longer, Grayson watched the scene. Trent seemed to know how to direct and was coaching the leading man, who was rehearsing a love episode with the woman.

As a director Trent was slow but thorough. He made them go through the scene three times before he ordered to crank. In fact he seemed to prolong everything he wanted done. Satisfied at last, the taking began.

Everybody was deeply interested. Every one but Grayson, who slipped away unobserved, suddenly remembering that he had left his pipe on the porch railing. No one saw him leave, as he took a short cut across the lawn behind a row of trees and bushes.

Reaching the porch, he saw his pipe and was about to pick it up when a slight noise at the back of the house reached him. Stealing to the end of the porch, he peeked around its corner.

Then he drew quickly back. What he had seen paralyzed him with astonishment.

Again he looked carefully. There, in the broad daylight, stood a large touring-car, to which two men were carrying silverware, lamps, pictures and other articles and stowing them away in the back, while a third handed the things out from a rear doorway of the house!

Grayson stood undecided. Matters shaped themselves rapidly. Trent, his cheap company, his request for the servants in order to get them all out of the house, the chauffeur sounding the gabriel as a signal!

It was all as plain as day. A gang of clever crooks, with a cleverer leader, had the house in their hands.

It would be useless to confront them. They outnumbered his own force two to one, and very likely were equipped with guns as well. And it was a mile to the village.

Grayson made up his mind quickly. He would locate the telephone and call for aid. In the meantime he would match his wits against Trent's.

Stealing along the porch, he entered the front door. He met no one in the foyer hall but saw no phone. Surely there must be one in the house and he meant to find it.

Tiptoeing up the stairs, he reached the first floor. A phone rested on a small table in the hallway. Carefully he lifted the receiver and placed it to his ear.

If only he could make the call before the men returned for more plunder!

Receiving no response, he looked down. The crooks had taken no chances; the wires were cut!

Suddenly a door creaked below. Grayson knew the thieves had returned.

Stealing along the hallway, he turned to the right and paused. Some one had started up the stairs. To stand where he was would mean discovery. There was no alternative, so he opened a door at random and entered.

The room proved to be a library. Nothing had been disturbed. On a table was a phone.

Grabbing the instrument, Grayson waited breathlessly for an answer. He dared not look to see if the wires had been cut.

Suddenly he heard a voice: "Number, please."

Placing his mouth to the transmitter, he spoke so low that the operator could not hear him and told him so.

"Listen," he said a little louder. "Rush the police to Silas Mawbrey's house. There are burglars here. Do you understand?"

The girl did not stop to ask questions. From his low voice she must have understood the necessity for speed and the futility of curiosity.

"I'll notify at once," came back the answer. Then she cut off and Grayson dropped the receiver back on the hook.

So far so good. If he could stall matters for ten or fifteen minutes he—

Suddenly he stopped ruminating as he watched the door. He had heard a noise in the hall outside.

For a second that seemed hours he waited. During that moment a thousand things flashed through his mind.

Had Trent noticed the absence of the supposed moving picture star? And if so what would his next move be?

The window in the room gave Bob an idea. Perhaps the turn he had made in the hall to get to the library had brought him around to the other side of the house. Noiselessly he stole to the window. He

could see the grounds. Placing his head alongside the window pane he looked sideways, and caught a glimpse of Marion and Burton standing together. He could also see Hadley, but no one else.

Evidently Trent was still playing his game, for Marion, Burton, and the butler seemed to be watching with interest.

Grayson breathed a sigh of relief. Trent then had not discovered his absence. But in this Grayson was wrong. Trent had missed the supposed movie actor, and when he did not return believed he had gone to the house and had been overpowered by the three confederates.

Trent was playing the game for all it was worth. As soon as he heard two blasts from the confederates' machine going down the road at the back of the house, it would be time to make his adieux, and he meant to do this gracefully and without trouble if possible.

Grayson suddenly turned from the window. Again he had heard a noise at the door. There was no doubt of it now, some one was standing outside.

The phone caught his eye. Reaching over he grabbed it, and placed it carefully underneath the table, out of sight.

He knew the crooks would come to ransack the library. One thing he resolved: they would not get out of the house if he could help it. He had not long to wait, for suddenly the library door flew open and two men stood on the threshold!

At sight of Grayson they stopped. Undoubtedly his presence was unexpected, and, from the expressions on their faces, more than unwelcome.

Bob waited, eying the two and taking their measure. One was a burly fellow, the other short and stocky. Both of them appeared to be tough customers.

The big fellow had whipped out a revolver. Slowly he advanced into the room. Deliberately he covered Grayson.

"T'row up yer hands!" he growled.

Slowly Bob raised his arms.

"Soich this dude, Red."

Red advanced and fumbled about Grayson's pockets. For a second Bob's arms wavered. He felt like taking the scoundrel by the throat.

"Keep up de hands!" roared Red's pal.

Red passed his hands swiftly into all of Grayson's pockets, removing his watch and wallet, which he handed to his companion with a grin.

"No smoke-wagon, Buck," Red announced; "not even a knife."

"If it's all the same to you," Grayson said, addressing the individual who was known as Buck, "I'd prefer dropping my hands. I have no gun and would like to know what you want here?"

The big fellow guffawed.

"Can dat stuff, bo," he said, poking Red in the ribs. "Did yuh get it, Red? The dude asked yuh a qeshon?"

Red grinned. He enjoyed the situation, or perhaps made believe he did, to humor Buck, whom he seemed to fear.

"And what cha doin' here yerself?" demanded Buck.

"Live here," lied Grayson. "Had fallen asleep in that chair when I heard you outside the door."

"Dat's a lot of noise," cried Buck, pointing a finger at Bob. "You're de guy we heard sneaking along de hall and we didn't know de room yuh had gone inter. Hey, what cha doin' wit dat stuff on yer face and eye?" he suddenly demanded.

At Buck's words Red took another look at Grayson. Both of them suddenly realized he was made up.

Bob could not repress a smile. He had forgotten the part he was playing, and hugely enjoyed the expressions of astonishment on the faces of the two thugs.

Before he had a chance to answer, Red, whose ferret-like eyes had been roaming about the room, spied the telephone under the table.

"Give a look, Buck," he cried, "dis guy has put one over on us. Dese wires is on to er private phone."

Buck's eye followed the direction of Red's finger. For a second his pal's warning had distracted him, and in that second Grayson acted.

Swinging around he planted his right fist on Red's jaw with such force that the fellow sank to the floor without a sound.

With a growl Buck sprang for Bob. The thug was a bigger and heavier man than Grayson, but not so quick, and like men of his type slow at thinking.

Grayson's one object was to get the gun. He knew Buck was desperate but would not shoot for fear of attracting the crowd on the grounds. But at that Grayson was taking no chances.

As Buck rushed him he side-stepped, grabbed his right arm and shoved it upwards with a quick stroke. The trick

worked. Buck let go the gun and it dropped to the floor.

With a curse the big man grappled with his opponent. Around the room they struggled, knocking over chairs and anything that was in their way, Grayson playing all the time to let the other use and waste his energy, and to keep him from swinging his arms for a punch.

They had circled the room and were now near the door. Buck was panting from his exertions in trying to unlock his arms from Grayson's grip. But Bob was saving his strength as he allowed the big man to struggle and carry him with him.

At last he saw an opening. Letting go his hold, he suddenly stepped back and drove home his fist in the same place where he had caught Red.

Buck reeled. Bob's left shot out, cracking the thug on the other side of his jaw. With a groan Buck staggered, groped madly with his hands in the air, and slowly sank to the floor, falling over the body of his pal.

For a second Grayson stood with flushed face looking down at the two, not seeming to realize what had happened. Suddenly he thought of Marion. There was no time to be lost in getting to her side now, for he knew that if Trent suspected what had happened he would resort to desperate measures to make his getaway.

Spying the gun on the floor Grayson was about to start for it when something from behind hit him on the head. It was something heavy and he felt his senses leaving him, but not before in the turmoil of his brain, he heard a loud shout coming from the front of the house, the honk of an automobile horn and the bark of a gun.

The third confederate stood in the doorway with a blackjack in his hand as Grayson sank to the floor beside the bodies of the two men he had felled.

V.

WHEN Bob opened his eyes he could not realize at first where he was. The room was dark save for a shaded electric lamp sending a subdued light wherever its rays touched. He was lying on a bed which seemed unusually soft and comfortable to his aching bones and the pain in his head.

Slowly he closed his eyes again. A delicious perfume permeated the place.

His brain was in a muddle. He imagined he saw a thousand moving picture machines

turning at once. He also saw himself putting his arms around a girl who called him Bob. She said it very softly, but in such a way as made it very sweet to hear.

He opened his eyes again. Some one was standing by the bed. It was Marion.

Grayson gazed at her.

"Did you just call my name?" he asked.

She colored and became confused.

"Did you?" Bob repeated his question.

"Oh, you've come to," she murmured.

"Thank Heaven. I'll call Mr. Burton."

"Please don't," he pleaded.

Marion hesitated.

"You have not answered my question, Miss Mawbrey," he reminded her.

"I did speak your name," she slowly admitted, "but I did not think you had become conscious. When Dr. Winthrop left he said you would come to in several hours. It is now eight o'clock and he said no one was to go into your room until he returned at nine, or unless you called."

"And you disobeyed him?" There was a mischievous look in Bob's eyes.

"Not exactly," she faltered, "I was passing and just wanted to peek in to see if you were all right."

At this point the door of the room slowly opened and the dark head of Burton appeared around it.

"Come in—er—Frankie," Grayson called out; "tell me what's happened."

Burton advanced slowly toward the bed.

"Bob, old man," he fairly choked out, "thank Heaven you've come around."

Marion rose. Shyly she looked at Grayson.

"I must go down-stairs a minute," she said. "Now that Mr. Payne is here," she added laying special emphasis on the name as she smiled and watched Grayson's dubious expression, "you won't be alone."

"Please don't go," said Grayson. "I remember asking that of you a minute ago. I mean it just as much now."

"I'll be back after a while—er—Mr. Grayson."

"I wish you'd call me Bob then if you must go."

"Why?"

"Because you did a minute ago."

"You were dreaming then," she said, bending nearer to him so that her mouth came close to his ear. "But keep on dreaming," she whispered. "Sometimes dreams come true."

Her words caused Grayson to close his

eyes. He reached out his right arm and a hand stole into his. Slowly he opened his eyes.

He was holding Burton's hand, or to be more exact, Burton was holding his. Marion had left the room.

"I'll be hanged," Grayson laughed, "the match-maker and the match-breaker. Tommy, tell me what's happened?"

The look of concern had left Burton's face. Now that his friend had regained consciousness and appeared to be normal, his anxiety was over.

"Things certainly have happened, Bob," he replied. "She knows you're not a movie star, old fellow, but she said that no movie hero could have done what you did."

Grayson smiled.

"You told her all, then?"

Burton nodded.

"Under the circumstances I had to. When two machines filled with local police entered the grounds Trent saw the game was up. He flashed a gun, but the sheriff potted him in the arm before he had a chance to use it."

"Every one was arrested then?"

"Every one," answered Burton. "The gang was rounded up. Of course, we did not know what it was all about, but when I saw Trent's gun flash I knew something was wrong."

"I heard a shot," Grayson told him. "It was just after I was hit on the head by something."

"By one of Trent's thugs," explained Burton. "We got him, too. He was hiding under a table in the library when the sheriff and his men found him. Two other ruffians were lying on the floor."

Grayson smiled. Memories of a recent fight in which he had come out the victor returned to his mind.

"And Trent?" asked Grayson. "What about him?"

"He made a confession, a long statement in which he seemed to take much pride. Said he had been a moving-picture director; admitted that he had been crooked and became discredited. Lost his position and could not get another. Went to the Coast, where he figured in a series of dangerous escapades, and finally came East. Got in with a gambling crowd, you saw some of them to-day, and conceived the idea of the motion picture gag because, as he said, 'he knew the game.'"

Grayson whistled. "Pretty slick at that,"

he muttered. "But how did he happen to come here?"

"Said he had read of Silas Mawbrey going to Washington. He knew Mawbrey was a widower, had also heard of his eccentric disposition, and figured that his daughter would not be entertaining friends. The neighborhood, too, appealed to him because of the isolation of the place."

"How did you work around our own affair?" Grayson now inquired.

"Made a clean breast of it," Burton answered. "It was devilish embarrassing."

"And what did she say?" Grayson demanded eagerly.

"Hardly anything. At first she was dreadfully surprised. Of course, I put it down as a lark. Told her I had heard of her from Alice Harrison, and all that, you know."

"But was she disappointed or angry over our false misrepresentation?"

"Apparently neither. If you ask me, she was tickled to death to learn that you did so much in order to meet her."

"I love her, Tommy," Grayson sighed.

Just then a knock sounded on the door, and Marion entered.

At sight of Grayson sitting up in a chair, smoking his pipe, she stopped.

"Dr. Winthrop said—" she began.

But Grayson only laughed.

"Oh, come now," he said, "why have me lie in bed when I feel so well?"

"But you know doctor's orders—"

The look of anxiety on her face thrilled Bob. In that moment he felt he could have whipped Trent's gang all over again.

"I can see you're very wilful," she said. "You usually have your own way, don't you?"

"Usually," replied Grayson in a low tone.

He was watching her, and under those steady eyes of his she blushed, and he knew he had won.

"Miss Mawbrey," he began, "I have several apologies to make to you."

Marion was gazing at the floor, and Burton caught Grayson's eye.

"Bob, I'm going down to see to the car," he said; "light the lights and all that, you know."

But it is doubtful if the other two heard him. They had other things to think about.

And for some time they sat talking, and what they said was for their own ears alone, but we have an idea it was about movie men for a day, with side references to wedding bells and love for a lifetime.

The Old West



per Contract

by William Wallace Cook

A TWO-PART STORY—PART TWO.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS ALREADY PRINTED.

MARTIN REEVES has gone from the East to the West to seek his fortune. Not readily finding it, he takes up with an offer to be the Tenderfoot in Castle's '40 Camp, which, failing to make the Zone at the Frisco Fair, arrived on a mysterious errand at Nugget Notch, patched up out of Rattlesnake City. Lady Ann Bobbett is one inducement for him to remain, but fresh mystery crops up when Judge Brand arrives on the scene and hints that Lady Ann is really the daughter of his old friend, Hugh Adams, and heiress to a fortune.

But nobody can make Judge Brand out. He appears to believe that the members of the camp are genuine Westerners, and invites five men of nerve to ride down the gulch with him on the old stage-coach used for the fake hold-ups. Reeves volunteers first, and so shames four others into doing likewise; but after they get going down the dugway, the four drop off one by one, and only Reeves remains on the box beside the judge, whose sanity he now begins to doubt.

CHAPTER VI.—(Continued).

MEN OF NERVE.

CRACK!
The lash sounded like a pistol shot just against the ear of the off forward mule. The animal jumped sidewise, and a sickening fear plunged through Reeves as he felt the hind wheels go over the trail's edge and the whole after part of the coach slump and slide.

By then, the judge was standing up plying the whip furiously.

"Pull, you long-legged imps!" he roared.

The slipping ceased, and there was a nerve-racking grinding and complaining on the part of the shaky old Concord.

Would the vehicle hang together? Would the harness hold? Would the strength of the mules be sufficient to drag them clear of danger?

For a full minute Reeves scarcely breathed. He felt tremors in the battered framework beneath him, as though it were all about to fly into scrap like the lamented one-hoss shay. But, by a wonderful decree of chance, this did not happen.

The mules strained in their collars, the coach came forward and, presently, was rolling onward and downward on its wheels.

Reeves, his eyes shut and his hands rigidly gripping the seat, presently became aware of an easier motion and the mules at a trot. He opened his eyes as one who comes out of a nightmare to find the judge holding all four lines in his left hand and lighting a cigar with his right.

They were in the bottom of the gulch and proceeding comfortably along towards the camp.

Judge Brand tossed away the burnt match, took a second cigar from the breast

of his flannel shirt and passed it to the Tenderfoot.

"Shake!" said he solemnly, and took Reeves by the hand. "You're a whole man, son, and you've got more nerve than the other four put together. I don't want you to herd with such trash any longer. Pick up your traps this afternoon and come to my adobe. Can you play chess?"

"A—a little," answered Reeves, still dazed.

"Better and better. Don't forget, I'm counting on your company for the rest of the time I'm in camp. I've been looking for a real man, Reeves, and I guess I've found him. But isn't it disappointing to go hunting for an able-bodied Westerner and then dig up a lone Tenderfoot that fills the bill."

The judge trotted the mules up to the Spread Eagle Hotel, gave them over to Smedders and he and Reeves climbed down from the box.

"Wh—where are the others, judge?" inquired Colonel Hungerford.

"Lost their nerve and took to the trail," answered the judge. "That was the finest drive I ever had in my life. I have certainly enjoyed myself. Remember what I told you, Reeves," and he turned and strode away in the direction of his quarters—whistling as he went.

CHAPTER VII.

A CASE OF HOMESICKNESS.

FOR Reeves, the best thing to come out of that joy ride with Judge Brand was the invitation to change his lodgings. The bunkroom at the hotel, with its indiscriminate mingling of guests and its lack of privacy, had never appealed to the Easterner, and he gladly welcomed the opportunity to move into more agreeable quarters.

That very evening he transferred himself and his two suitcases to the judge's adobe.

Judge Brand, in spite of his eccentricities, was a whole-souled sort of person. There was genuine warmth in the greeting he extended to Reeves.

The adobe had been divided into four rooms by means of canvas partitions. Two of these rooms, but little larger than cubbyholes, were supplied with cots and used for sleeping purposes.

The living room was spread with Navajo

rugs and a fine bearskin, and boasted a table, rocking chairs and a few books. A belt with the judge's derringers swung from a peg in the wall, and from another peg dangled a coiled riata. On a shelf stood a tin lamp with a reflector, a tobacco jar and a tray with pipes and sulphur matches.

Open on the table was a folding chess-board with various pieces distributed on the squares. The fourth room was the kitchen. Sing Lee prepared the meals and looked after the house.

After supper the judge lighted the lamp, focused the rays on the table and suggested a game. Reeves could play chess fairly well, but when he and his host had put in two hours at the game the young man had to admit that Judge Brand could handle the pieces as expertly as he manipulated the four-mule team.

"That will do for now, Reeves," said the judge, pushing back from the table and getting up to refill his pipe. "Amos doesn't play, and I'm mighty glad to find some one in this camp who knows the game. Cram your briar with some more of the oh-be-joyful and let's smoke a talk before turning in."

Reeves shook the ashes out of his bowl, then crowded it full and fired it.

"I suppose," remarked the judge, out of his own little fog of smoke, "that the camp is guessing considerably about me and my reason for being here? Well, I don't mind letting you in on the secret. It is not so much a case of foolishness as one of nostalgia."

Reeves opened his eyes at this, but did not let his curiosity betray itself in words.

Judge Brand whiffed a few feathery rings into the air, watched them twist and turn for a moment, then continued.

"I am rising sixty-five, my boy, and for my last quarter of a century have been cribbed, cabined and confined in a little town in New York State. I've an only sister living there. Her name is Robbins, and Amos is her son and my nephew.

"Between the ages of ten and forty, however, I was here in the West; but it was the Old West then, where a man had to be a man or yield place to his betters. I grew up among the mines and the cattle ranges, and those who knew taught me to handle a gun and a rope, to recognize a blow-out of quartz when I saw it and to shake a horn-spoon.

"I drifted all over the Pacific Slope from Canada to Mexico until I was thirty; and then"—the judge paused—"then," he added, "I fell in with Hugh Adams."

With his pipe between his fingers he bowed his head and dropped into a reverie. He roused presently.

"Adams was a prince of his kind," he resumed; "one of those big, breezy Westerners who have given to the word 'pard' a luster that seems to have faded and died with the old institutions. For ten years we were pards, Adams and I. What I had was his, what he had was mine. When we famished in the thirsty deserts, he gave me the last drop of water; and when we were snowed in and starving among the northern mountains I have forced on him our last morsel of food.

"Do you get what I mean, Reeves? We were *pards*, I tell you. Finally we struck it—a ledge that gave us samples fuzzy with wire gold, and with the yellow stuff right from the grass roots down. We opened up the prospect, sold out for enough to make us both wealthy and then—we separated.

"After ten years our trails divided. I went East, and Adams remained West. I haven't known what it meant really to live since I waved my hat to my old pard and left him on the hill watching me out of sight. The sun was going down behind him—and, if you have the heart for such things, I don't think you'll ever forget how the sun goes down among the mountains and mesas.

"The red ball with its crimson banners was half down when I looked my last on Hugh Adams! I never saw him again, but the picture of Hugh and the sunset has stayed with me for twenty-five years. . . .

"Well, I looked after my sister and my nephew in York State. She was a widow and in need. I placed her in comfortable circumstances, and I sent Amos to 'prep' school and to college, and when he went down to the big city I helped him there. They did things to me, there in the East; sent me to the Legislature, and finally made me a judge.

"I tried to be contented, but I couldn't. The Old West had been bred into me, body and spirit. I missed the things I had been used to, and I was homesick for the wild places and the wilderness ways. Nostalgia, see?" The judge smiled. "And it got to be chronic.

"Going East when I was forty, and stay-

ing right there for twenty-five years, didn't make an Easterner out of me. I had left my heart in the Rockies and beyond. Although I tried to be contented with York State, on my sister's account, I never could quite make it.

"Vague promptings arose in me to do scandalous things—to strap on my six-shooters and go tearing down the streets of my sister's respectable city, perforating signs and snuffing street lights; to kick over conventional traces at some banquet or other, and shock everybody by jumping on a table and sounding a warwhoop; or to break out in court with a display of barbarism that would have outraged bench and bar and might have landed me in a mad-house.

"I was sane enough, but the old times so stirred in me that it was hard to keep them down. At last, Reeves, in order not to make a spectacle of myself I had to leave the bench, and withdraw as much as possible from the public eye. About that time, when I was fighting hard to restrain my feelings, I received a letter from Hugh Adams."

The judge fell into a reverie again, and Reeves waited.

"From Adams," he went on at last, stirring restlessly, "and he was in Moccasin, Utah, on his death-bed. Poor old Hugh was dying of a broken heart, but I will not go into that. He transmitted to me a fortune in ready cash to be held in trust for a daughter, who might be dead or living, but who was as completely lost to him as though the earth had really closed above her.

"Glad of an excuse to break my Eastern shackles, I went West, looking for the girl. But the West—where was it? In Kansas City they spoke of 'out West' as being somewhere farther on; and it was the same in Omaha. I found electric cars, automobiles, telephones and grand opera; and in Cheyenne I was arrested for carrying concealed weapons. The West that I had known and longed for, however, had been suffocated by Progress; and the one wild spot, that was still wild, was Rattlesnake City in the heart of the desert—a camp deserted and in ruins.

"I laid a wreath on the grave of Hugh Adams, wound my Western memories with crape and returned to York State a baffled and discouraged man. But I was not cured of the nostalgia. I knew positively that if

I could not have my fling in the Old West, I would remain a melancholy, disheartened old fool to the end of my days. Then I had the Big Idea, and I gave Amos Robbins a large check, sent him beyond the Missouri and told him to work the thing out.

"The Idea was this: Repair Rattlesnake City; rejuvenate it with a choice assortment of Old Westerners; let the mining camp life of the 'sixties and 'seventies ebb and flow in the ways I had known, then land with a roar in the midst of it and take a long and satisfying drink from the spring which time had dried at its source, but which might be induced to flow—temporarily.

"It has been expensive, but I wasn't disposed to examine the cost mark. I had to have it, even if it had stripped me of my last dollar. The result has not been all I might desire; nevertheless, I am making the most of what I have, and when I get through and return to York I believe the nostalgia will be a thing of the past. The medicine, Reeves, is effecting a cure."

Martin Reeves had listened intently to all this. Judge Brand cheerfully admitted his folly, and as cheerfully defended it.

"Now, in the midst of this novel experience," the judge went on, "I find a sudden, practical slant given to my haphazard activities. A nugget chain claims my attention, dropping apparently out of a clear sky and in a manner most astonishing.

"Adams and I washed those nuggets out of the sands, and had two chains forged of them with golden links. He kept one and I kept the other. Odd and most unusual trinkets they were, and by certain marks I have identified the one owned by my old pardner."

He leaned toward Reeves, his deep-set eyes shining with excitement.

"How came that chain of Adams into this old camp?" he demanded. "That is what I want to know."

"I thought it fell into Ezra Bobbett's hands with Lady Ann?" returned Reeves.

"Ezra Bobbett?" The judge smiled dubiously. "Years ago, I—"

He broke off abruptly.

"Well," he continued, "Ezra Bobbett's word does not settle the matter. Nor is Miss Bobbett's word final, for she was too young to know about the chain when she fell into the care of the Bobbetts. Manifestly, Lady Ann makes her statement on the word of her foster father.

"Reeves," and here the old gentleman grew judicial, "what do you know of the man called Rayner? He exerts a strange influence over the Bobbetts—how and why? Can you shed any light on that? If you can, then I urge you to do so—for the good of Lady Ann Bobbett herself."

Reeves was startled by the earnestness of the judge's manner, and by the deeply significant tone of his voice. *For the good of Lady Ann herself!* What lay back of that? Reeves was not only startled but greatly troubled.

"I have feared for a long time," said he gravely, "that some danger threatened Miss Bobbett! A beautiful girl, Judge Brand, a wonderful girl, with a character as fine as her face is fair. Can—can you explain to me further just what you mean when you say you must find out about Rayner, and for the girl's own good?"

The eyes glimmered under their bushy brows.

"You wear your heart on your sleeve, my boy," went on the judge, "and I see that I was not wrong in choosing you for a confidant. I can't tell you more on the subject of Rayner and Lady Ann just now, but if you can shed any light on the matter of Rayner's influence with the Bobbetts you will do well to be frank with me."

"I have noticed the influence you mention," said Reeves, reflectively, "and I believe Gentleman Jim is holding something over Ezra Bobbett, but as to what that something is I am as much in the dark as you are."

Judge Brand settled back in his chair with a look of disappointment.

"But I saw the nugget chain before it came to your attention in El Rio Rey," Reeves added.

"In Miss Bobbett's possession?"

"No, in Rayner's."

Again the judge dropped forward, elbows on his knees and his eyes sparkling.

"Now we're getting at it," said he. "When and where, Reeves?"

The Tenderfoot related the incident. He had barely finished when a faint rap sounded on the door. It was late—nearly midnight—and not an hour when callers were to be expected.

"Amos, I suppose," murmured the judge, and stepped to the door and pulled it open.

Another moment and he fell back, amazed. A slender figure, swathed in a long cloak, had come unsteadily into the

lamp's glow. Reeves was on his feet in an instant.

"Lady Ann!" he exclaimed.

It was the girl. The cloak's hood had fallen from her head revealing a tear-stained face, distraught and troubled.

"If I had not known you were here, Marty," the girl almost whispered, "I should not have dared to come. Judge Brand," and her voice rose shrilly, excitedly, "if I am really Lorena Adams why may I not have some of the money that is coming to me—*now*?"

She clutched her hands convulsively before her.

"Oh, I must have money at once; at once, do you hear, Judge Brand?"

"*Mujercita!*" said Reeves, softly, supporting the girl with his arm while he led her to a chair. "What is wrong? What has happened?"

Lady Ann sank into the chair, bowed her face in her hands and her whole form was racked with sobs.

Reeves was astounded. Could this be the same girl who had been so happy, that morning, so sure of a bright future? He looked at the judge in perplexity.

The older man's face had grown kindly and gentle. He closed the door and laid a fatherly hand on Lady Ann's shoulder.

"Calm yourself, Lady Ann," he urged. "You know you are with friends. What troubles you?"

The girl lifted her head and looked at Judge Brand with tears shining in her eyes.

"It is a great deal of money I must have, Judge Brand," she said brokenly; "fifty thousand dollars. I need it—I can't do without it. Could you give it to me? My father left me a large fortune, you say, and surely I could spare fifty thousand dollars?"

She caught one of his hands in both her own and clung to him with passionate appeal.

The judge patted the hands reassuringly.

"Why do you have to have all that money on such short notice, Lady Ann?" he asked.

"Oh, I mustn't tell you, I just can't tell you," she breathed, "but you must take my word."

"It isn't necessary for you to have it tonight, is it?" the judge asked. "It would take several days to secure such a large sum as that. You understand that part of it, don't you?"

"Please get it for me as soon as you can. Will you?"

Judge Brand looked down into the distressed face of the girl for a moment.

"Some one has made a demand for the money?" he inquired.

"Yes, yes," Lady Ann whispered, and looked about her fearfully.

"It was Jim Rayner, wasn't it?"

A frightened glow sprang into the wide, hazel eyes.

"How did you guess?" wailed the girl; "how did you know?"

"Never mind," he answered soothingly. "You can trust me just as implicitly as you do Martin Reeves. We will protect you from Rayner, if not with the money, then with something that will meet the demand more effectively."

"I am not the one who needs protection," burst out Lady Ann; "it is Pa Bobbett. He—he— Oh, I am telling you everything!"

"Then Reeves and I will take care of Ezra Bobbett. He will not suffer through the schemes of Jim Rayner. Take my word for it. You believe that I am telling you the truth, don't you?"

"Yes, but you do not know—"

"Perhaps I know more than you think. Go back to the Bazar, now, and don't worry. Reeves will go with you. I pledge you my word that no harm will come to you, or to Ezra Bobbett. Isn't that enough?"

"I don't see how you can understand," said Lady Ann, dully. "I understand only a little. Ma Bobbett is almost distracted. An hour ago Ezra"—she shivered—"tried to shoot himself with a revolver, but Ma Bobbett caught it away just in time. After that, I just had to come to you, Judge Brand!"

The seriousness of the situation plainly made a deep impression on the judge.

"You go back to the Bazar, Lady Ann," said the judge, "and tell Ezra Bobbett not to be a fool. Make it clear to him that I will see that Rayner's demand is met, and in a satisfactory manner."

He stepped away from the girl and motioned to Reeves. The latter went to Lady Ann.

"You must have confidence in Judge Brand, *mujercita*," murmured Reeves. "He means exactly what he says."

"But the money—"

"If the money has to be paid," put in the judge, "I will pay it."

Reeves half-lifted Lady Ann to his side, and led her from the house. He was scarcely less excited than the girl herself, but he had a firm faith in Judge Brand.

The camp was dark, and no one was to be seen in the squalid little street. Reeves and Lady Ann had almost reached the door of the Bazar before either of them spoke.

"Do you care to tell me anything about Rayner's demand for the money, Lady Ann?" Reeves asked, softly.

"Only one thing, Marty," said the girl. "Ezra Bobbett did something wrong, years and years ago, and Jim Rayner knows about it."

"Oh!" Reeves murmured. "Well, no one needs to worry now. Judge Brand, I think, is wiser than we know, and he has given his pledge that no harm will come to you or Ezra Bobbett through Gentleman Jim. Good night, *mujercita!* Don't fret about this any longer."

She clung to him as he kissed her, and gently he disengaged her hands and opened the Bazar door. She passed into the dark little shop uncertainly, and Reeves turned away and slowly retraced his steps in the direction of the judge's adobe.

He was giving his whole mind to the problem so suddenly presented by Lady Ann.

Midway between the gloomy and deserted honkatonk and the glowing front windows of the judge's, two wraithlike figures started up beside the path. They rose into view seemingly out of the solid ground, and with no warning of any kind.

Reeves, his head bowed in thought, did not see the skulking forms until too late.

A blow fell. The Tenderfoot staggered and tried to reach out with his hands. A bewildered cry escaped his lips. Then there was another blow, and another.

Reeves crumpled downward, blank darkness rolled over his brain, and his senses fled.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE POCKET.

THE Tenderfoot awoke as from a bad dream. He was lying on his back, his face upturned to the sky. The stars, bright as daggers, seemed to plunge their beams through his eyes and pierce his brain.

There was a fierce throbbing at the back

of his head, and his wits were confused. Picking up the chain of events where he had dropped it, he believed he was still in the camp. Two men had made a sudden and unprovoked attack upon him, and he had been struck down in his tracks.

"Judge!" he called waveringly; "Judge Brand!"

He knew the judge must be waiting for him at the adobe, and he believed his voice would carry. The call was not answered, however, and painfully he raised himself to a sitting posture.

A wall of blank darkness hemmed him in on all sides. This puzzled him. Where was the light in the judge's windows? He knew he ought to see that; and he knew he ought to get up and go on to the judge, who was waiting for him.

He made an attempt to get his feet under him, but his muscles went limp, and he fell back. Demons of torment were hammering at his brain, and he experienced least pain when lying at full length.

He closed his eyes again.

His second awakening was in broad daylight. He felt cramped and stiff, and his head continued to ache. But his brain was clearer, and more capable of dealing with the situation.

A shock of surprise followed when he sat up and looked around.

He was not in Nugget Notch, after all. Gloomy wall surrounded him; they were not half the height of the gulch walls, however. Furthermore, they were on all sides of him.

He drew a hand across his bewildered eyes. Where was he? The place was one he had never seen before.

On right and left the walls were separated by a space of perhaps two hundred feet; the other way the distance between them would have had to be measured in rods. Flat ground filled the bottom of the basin, and it was scantily covered with mesquite bushes.

A bit of a creek ran down the middle of the queer arroyo, flowing from the base of one cliff and into the foot of another. The walls at every point were precipitous, in some places overhanging.

Here and there they were festooned with creepers and masked with scraggly growths of greasewood and cactus.

Reeves crawled to the creek. So small was the stream that he could have jumped across it. The water was cold, and he lifted it in his cupped hands and splashed it over

his aching head. This had tonic effects, and lessened the pain and put fresh vigor into his body.

"Here's a go!" he muttered, after he had risen to his feet and dried his face on a handkerchief. "Two men made an attack on me in Nugget Notch, and while my wits were wool-gathering they brought me here and left me. Who were the men? And why did they bring me to this place?"

He had two enemies at the Notch—Rayner and Don Quesada. They must have been the ones who struck him down and carried him out of the camp.

He did not know this certainly, for he had not recognized either of the men at the time of the attack, but the logic of circumstances indicated Gentleman Jim and the don. What was the motive behind the treachery?

The gambler was suspicious of Reeves, and had shown this often and in many ways. Reeves had seen the linked nuggets in Rayner's possession; Reeves had avowed his determination to protect Lady Ann, and Reeves had gone to live at the judge's.

Had all this any bearing on what had happened to Reeves during the night? Lady Ann may have been watched when paying her visit to Judge Brand, and when she left the judge's she and Reeves may have been spied upon. And what had the girl said?

Rayner had made a demand on Ezra Bobbett and accompanied it with threats. The girl's call on the judge had perhaps aroused the gambler's apprehensions regarding the success of his scheme. It was possible that he had tried to clear Reeves out of the way, for a time, so that his conspiracy might win.

"Yes," muttered Reeves darkly, "Rayner and Quesada were the ones. Perhaps I could not prove it positively, but I am sure of it in my own mind. If they wanted me out of the way, though, why did they leave me here? They must have known I could get back to Nugget Notch."

He started around the walls looking for a way out. When he had finished a complete tour of the basin it dawned upon him that his two enemies had planned more intelligently than he had imagined.

He was in a pocket of the hills, and could find no way over the low cliffs. It was a peculiar—even a desperate—situation, but Reeves had to take it as he found it. He was in a *cul-de-sac*, closed at both ends.

At the foot of the wall where Reeves had first recovered his senses there lay a thirty-foot rope. It must have been a loop of this rope that he remembered to have pulled from under his arms on first coming to himself in the pocket. The wall at this place was an overhang, and the top of the out-jutting rock formed a shelf twenty-five feet above him.

Reeves, it followed, had been lowered into the basin from the shelf, and the rope dropped after him. It had been easy enough for Rayner and Quesada. Reeves sat down in the shade of the overhang to think the situation over.

In the first place, he did not think he could be far from Nugget Notch. He did not believe he had remained unconscious very long after the attack, and his enemies would not have had time to carry him a great distance.

His first hurried examination had shown him no way out of that hole in the hills. He was a prisoner in the pocket, with plenty of water, but not a morsel of food.

Did Rayner and Quesada intend to leave him there to starve to death? If the gambler entertained such an idea he was deluding himself—so far as his schemes against the Bobbetts were concerned. Judge Brand knew what was going on, and he had his liberty.

Furthermore, Reeves's sudden and mysterious disappearance from the camp would start an investigation. The judge would suspect that Reeves had been a victim of foul play, and would turn instantly to Gentleman Jim as the one back of it.

"The judge will find me down here," the Tenderfoot assured himself. "All I have to do is to wait."

Reeves pushed his fingers up into his hair. The blows dealt him in the night had left swollen places, tender to the touch. These were his only injuries, and could easily be borne.

Already he was feeling almost as well as ever. If he had only had something to eat he would have been quite himself.

A whisper of sound came to him from the direction of the little stream and the mesquite bushes. Shifting his gaze suddenly, he saw the gaunt, tawny body of a coyote, half-revealed among the brush-tops. The brute stood looking at him with glittering eyes.

Picking up a fragment of stone, Reeves hurled it. The coyote ducked away, cleared

the stream at a jump and ran toward the other side of the pocket.

Reeves got to his feet and watched curiously. Again coming to a halt, the animal faced around and continued to watch him.

"The brute can't find anything to eat in this place," thought Reeves. "He must have a way of getting into the pocket and out of it again. I'll chase along and see where he goes."

As Reeves started, the coyote whirled and loped to a point nearer the opposite wall. Reeves jumped the creek, hurried on, and the coyote ducked into the trailing vines of the cliff-side, and vanished.

"Is there a way out, under that blanket of creepers?" Reeves speculated. "Where did that brute go, anyway?"

At his feet lay a wide circle of whitish stones. He gathered some of the smaller fragments for ammunition, and put them in his pockets; then, cautiously, he stepped to the foot of the wall, lifted the matted vines and found a steep slope that appeared, once on a time, to have held a path.

On hands and knees he crawled upward. It was a difficult climb, but he made progress. Finally he emerged head and shoulders from the vines to find himself at a narrow ledge that crossed the face of the wall to a clump of scraggly bushes.

Still crawling, Reeves negotiated the ledge, which was barely wide enough to hold him. He was at least twenty-five feet above the bottom of the pocket, and the trend of the ledge was upward.

At the bushes he paused. The dusty greenery curtained a fissure that cut through the wall and led toward the top. Clinging to the brush, Reeves stood erect.

Above and beyond he could see the coyote, crouched and planted against the steep side of the fissure and eying him keenly.

Reaching into his pocket for one of the stones, Reeves hurled it. The coyote whirled, with a snarl, and pawed furiously upward, presently vanishing over the crest of the wall.

The Tenderfoot crawled cautiously along the path the coyote had followed. After a few minutes of stiff work he pulled himself over the rim—and was out of the pocket!

A feeling of exultation ran through him. He was beating Rayner at his own game, and all that now remained was to find his way back to camp.

Crossing a small hogback, he came to a

gully whose bed descended towards the east. Sliding into the gully he took the easy slope and, after a time, rounded a turn and arrived at a lone cottonwood tree. That tree gave him his location, for it was the same cottonwood to which he and Lady Ann had once hitched their horses while they sat on a near-by boulder and talked.

The Tenderfoot's satisfaction expressed itself in a soft laugh.

"In a quarter of an hour," he murmured, "I'll be back at the judge's; and Rayner's little game will have missed fire. Wonder what the camp is thinking of my mysterious disappearance, about now?"

He started briskly toward the gulch, but had not gone far before he drew to a halt. Two men were coming up the gully; one of them was Jack Lightning-that-Strikes, and he was crouched forward with his beady eyes fixed on the ground and seemed to be trailing. At the Ute's heels came Judge Brand.

"Hello, judge!" Reeves cried.

The judge looked up, and the Indian straightened in a flash.

"By Jove!" Judge Brand exclaimed, in a tone of relief; "it's Reeves, himself. He shows up before we can find him, Jack."

The Ute grunted and drew to one side.

"You were looking for me, judge?" Reeves asked, as he came close.

"Yes. I got Jack, there, and he picked up the trail of a loaded horse and two men on foot. We figured that the horse's burden was you, Reeves, and that the two men were carrying you off. It was a pretty rough joke," the judge added, a queer look crossing his face.

"Joke?" returned Reeves, blankly.

"That's the way the camp looks at it—somebody played a joke on the Tenderfoot. I was the only one who took your disappearance seriously; every one else is laughing about it. I wasn't particularly alarmed, last night, because I thought you had probably remained with the Bobbetts to look after Ezra. When you failed to return I left the door unlocked and went to bed. After breakfast, this morning, I made inquiries at the Bazar. Well, there *was* some one besides myself who felt worried, and that was Miss Bobbett. Where have you been, and how were you taken away?"

"I was knocked down," answered Reeves grimly, "on my way back to your adobe from the Bazar. When I recovered my wits I was in a pocket." He began unloading

the bits of rock that weighed down his coat. "You see, judge, I was bruised and sore, and my head was aching, and—"

"Where did you get these samples?" cut in Judge Brand, catching up one of the white fragments and staring at it.

"Samples?" echoed Reeves. "I don't know what you mean. There was a coyote in the pocket and I gathered up a supply of stones to drive the brute ahead of me, and show me a way out of the place."

The judge, without answering, took a spectacle-case from the breast of his flannel shirt, opened it and got the glasses on his nose; then, through the lenses, his deep-set eyes peered at the white stone.

He drew a long breath.

"And this," he muttered, "has been found in the vicinity of the old, played-out mining camp! Why, if some of those old-timers had made the discovery, Rattlesnake City might to-day have been a metropolis! The gulch diggings petered out, but no one ever found the mother lode. Now—now—"

He broke off and whirled excitedly on Reeves.

"Don't you know," he demanded sharply, "that this is ore? Look at those yellow specks, Reeves!" and he held out the bit of float and pointed. "That is gold, man!" he added.

"You mean that I have found some gold ore?" queried the Tenderfoot.

The judge turned suddenly to Jack Lightning-that-Strikes.

"Go back to the camp, Jack," said he, "and say nothing about this. Great joke on the Tenderfoot, eh?" He laughed shortly. "Let it go at that."

Old Lightning-that-Strikes grunted again and moved off down the gully. The judge once more faced Reeves.

"I'm an old prospector," he went on, "and I know this stuff when I see it. Will you take me back to where you found the float? I want to look the ground over."

"I haven't had any breakfast," demurred Reeves, "and I'm pretty hungry."

"Bother that!" said the judge. "You have probably stumbled into more luck than you dream of, and we've got to run out this trail while it's fresh. Lead the way."

Judge Brand was excited; it was the first time Reeves had ever seen him so wrought up. They went back to the pocket, and the judge looked it over from the rim with delighted and wondering eyes; then they went down by the fissure, the ledge and the vine-

masked slope, and Reeves showed the place where he had picked up the float.

The judge became busy, at once, and every now and then an exclamation of delight would break from his lips.

Reeves stood apart and watched curiously while he worked. The old gentleman was too preoccupied with his labors to make any explanations.

He hurried all around the pocket, he surveyed the walls, he went down on his knees and scooped up sand from the bottom of the little creek, and finally he heaped up a cairn of stones with a stick in its center and fastened a piece of paper to it with a sliver.

He had torn the paper from a note-book and he had written something on it. The sun was past the zenith when he finally came to the Tenderfoot's side, warm and perspiring, but fairly glowing with happiness.

"This is all I lacked, Reeves," he remarked, "to make my pleasure in the old camp complete. That case of nostalgia is going to pan out big," and he chuckled. "How the old fellows who lived in Rattlesnake City ever missed this is more than I can guess. The whole bottom of this pocket is full of placer gold! Why, that little creek is a veritable Pactolus!

"But that isn't the big thing, although it's enough to make the revival of the old camp permanent. The ledge of gold where I have piled the monument is the thing most worth while. We've got to hurry back to Nugget Notch, and then I'm going to make a quick trip to Penyan. Don't breathe a whisper about this in the camp! Understand? At the right time, when we have made our own selections, we'll turn the crowd loose in the pocket, and let them gather up the trimmings. From the looks of things, you have blundered upon a fortune."

"That's all right, judge," returned Reeves, "but you seem to forget I am nearly starved. Haven't had any breakfast, and now it's past dinner-time, and—"

"You will be well repaid for your discomforts," cut in the judge. "That preliminary notice is put up for you," and he waved a hand toward the monument, the stick and the scrap of white paper. "It is right that you should have the big pickings, and I'll see that you get them."

He ceased speaking suddenly, and went into a roar of laughter.

"Say, Reeves," he added presently, wip-

ing his eyes, "this joke on the Tenderfoot is going to turn out a boomerang. Come on, now, and we'll get back to camp."

CHAPTER IX.

THE JUDGE TELLS BOBBETT A STORY.

REEVES did not allow the prospect of a fortune at the pocket to drive from his mind his theory regarding the duplicity of Gentleman Jim. In his ignorance, it seemed, he had made discoveries which the judge considered tremendously important; but the Tenderfoot refused to be dazzled by a vista of personal fortunes while the affairs of Lady Ann and the Bobbetts were in such a precarious state.

Reeves expounded his theory to Judge Brand on their way back to the camp.

"You don't know absolutely that Rayner and Quesada made the attack on you and carried you off to the pocket," commented the judge.

"It isn't necessary to know some things absolutely in order to be sure of them," countered Reeves. "There was no tenderfoot-joke at the bottom of last night's work, judge. Rayner thought I knew too much, and he wanted to get me out of the way."

"Very likely you are right, but it was a fine thing for you that you were bowled over and dropped into the pocket. A fine thing for the rest of us, too," the old gentleman added.

"If that's the case, then I am glad of it; you understand, though, judge, that I am worried about Miss Bobbett. Ezra Bobbett has done something—perhaps committed a crime—that Gentleman Jim knows about. The fifty thousand dollars is the gambler's price for keeping still."

"Now," said Brand, a little testily, "you leave all that to me, Reeves. We have matters of infinitely more importance to claim our attention at present. The affair of the Bobbetts can lie over for a few days. The hope of getting the money will be a restraint on Rayner, and I will take care of that fellow in my own good time.

"You will stay at my house while I am away in Penyan, and, of course, you will be careful not to let Rayner or any one else catch you at a disadvantage again. When I finish with this business I am going to tell Ezra Bobbett a story warranted to calm his troubled mind. You are now a dispenser of favors, and I'd like to know just

who you want in on that good thing at the pocket?"

"Yourself, first," answered Reeves.

"I was intending to see to that. If it had not been for me, remember, you would have thrown those ore samples away, and no one would ever have been the wiser."

"I want every one in camp to have a part in the good luck," said Reeves, "with the exception of Rayner and Quesada. I believe they are both crooked, and not entitled to a share in the strike."

"That is generous," returned the judge, approvingly. "Mind you don't say a word; just leave the handling of this proposition to me. There'll be a stampede to Nugget Notch when the truth gets out, and we've got to be protected up and down and across before that happens."

The old fellow threw back his shoulders and tossed his head exultantly.

"If I had not hungered and thirsted for the old times," he went on, "and if I had not tried to put a little life into the old camp, this new strike would never have been made. It's queer how events come about sometimes, Reeves!

"Just a passing glance at that pocket would never hold the keenest prospector alive; it's only when one gets down into it, and makes a close examination, that the bewildering possibilities show up. That little creek, for instance, is a freak stream. It comes out of one cliff and flows into another—an underground stream until it finally rills away into Nugget Gulch with its load of placer gold.

"But the whole Southwest is a sort of Nature's Wonderland. The Titans played strange pranks all through this country when the world was forming."

They passed Ree Middling, panning over the washed-out gravel in Nugget Creek. He waved his hat.

"Where'd they put you, son?" he cried. "Down in some old prospect hole?"

"I was in a hole for a while," Reeves called back, "but I got out of it all right."

"I'll lay dollars to chalk-marks," shouted Perdue, from the shade of the shack wall, "that any feller who'd stay with the jedge on his joy ride would jest nat'rally bob up serene an' smilin' no matter what was done to him!"

The camp turned out for a look at Reeves when word was passed that he had returned with the judge. There was a lot of good-natured joking, which he took in good part.

"That's the idea, my boy," said the judge. "Make them believe you think it was a joke, even if you know to the contrary."

Sing Lee made ready a substantial dinner, to which Reeves did full justice. Lady Ann and Ma Bobbett came to the adobe just as the judge and Reeves were getting up from the table.

"Marty!" exclaimed the girl, running forward. "We were so worried about you!"

"La, sakes," bubbled Ma Bobbett, "I tried to tell Liddy Ann all the time it was just a joke of some sort. I couldn't think for a minute you was in real trouble, Martin."

"How is Ezra?" asked the judge.

The face of the older woman clouded.

"Somethin' powerful heavy weighs on Ezra's mind, judge," she answered. "He ain't so bad as he was since he got that word from you, but he just mopes around like nearly the hull time. You'll look to him before long, judge, won't you?" she finished anxiously.

"Be sure of that. Ezra will soon be out of his troubles, and he'll be rewarded in a way that will surprise him. Now, don't ask any questions, please. I'm about to start for Penyan, and I'm in a tearing hurry. When I get back I am going to tell Bobbett a story that will take a load off his mind and make him feel twenty years younger."

Reeves was surprised at the change in Mrs. Bobbett. She was along in years, but had held her age well until coming to Nugget Notch. Now she had grown old in a few days, and her face was gray and haggard.

Her husband's troubles weighed upon her, of course, but it did not seem possible that these alone had wrought that fearful change in Ma Bobbett. Reeves guessed that something else—something that had to do with Lady Ann—was helping to destroy the older woman's peace of mind.

The callers remained only a few minutes, and when they went away the judge looked after them with sympathy glowing in his eyes.

"The Bobbets are in a bad way," he remarked, "but they'll soon weather the storm and come into pleasanter waters. I'll know before long whether Lady Ann has the fine, high spirit you talk about or whether she is just common clay. She is going to be tested, Reeves."

"She is pure gold," declared Reeves, earnestly, "and will stand any test. Her anxiety to help Ezra Bobbett, at any cost to herself, ought to make her character plain."

"It is a straw in the wind," admitted Judge Brand.

That afternoon the judge started for Penyan. He went in the democrat wagon with Robbins, however, and did not call upon Catamount Cal, the stage and the mules.

"What's the judge up to now, Reeves?" Castle inquired.

The Tenderfoot pleaded ignorance.

"This show seems to have been staged for his especial benefit," Castle went on, "and it's a good thing for us while it lasts. I can't pry anything out of Robbins, though, and whenever I mention the judge he shuts up like a clam.

"Everything around the camp is moving nicely except at the Bazar. I went in there for some tobacco this morning, and Mrs. Bobbett had her head on the counter and was crying in her apron. Mighty unusual for the old lady to shed tears. What in blazes is the matter?"

Reeves had nothing to say.

"I wanted to put on the stage hold-up," continued Castle, "along with the Vigilance Committee, the gun fight and the fake lynching, but Robbins is afraid the judge would become too active and clean up the committee and every one else. About all the Forty-niners have to do is to loaf along and make their grub-stakes grow in the hope of winning a prize. Can you beat this for a lay-out? Did you ever hear of anything like it?"

Reeves answered that it was a most remarkable situation, and got away from Castle and went back to the judge's adobe.

It was four days before Judge Brand and Robbins returned to Nugget Notch. Nothing worthy of record had happened in the camp.

Jim Rayner and Don Quesada had developed a sudden fondness for horseback rides, and hardly a day passed that they were not abroad somewhere in the saddle. Reeves watched them coming or going, and he wondered a little as to what they might be up to.

The judge brought a number of blank "location" notices from Penyan, and before supper, on the day of his return, he filled out one of them. When he had finished with the notice he made a copy, and the duplicate he handed to Reeves.

"To-morrow morning, directly after breakfast," said he, "you will take that paper out to the pocket and put it up on your claim in place of the memorandum I left there; then you will ride to Penyan and have this other notice recorded. Not until that is done will you be fully protected."

"I'll attend to it, judge," answered Reeves. "Are you going to call on Ezra Bobbett before long?"

"You and I will go to the Bazar as soon as supper is out of the way."

It was eight o'clock when Judge Brand and Reeves dropped in on the Bobbetts. Old Jack, the Ute, was buying some supplies in the store and Lady Ann was waiting on him. The girl looked up eagerly as the two visitors came in.

"You want to see dad?" she asked, in a tense voice.

The judge nodded and smiled reassuringly.

"Where is he?" he asked.

"In the back room with Ma Bobbett," said Lady Ann.

"I want you there, too," went on the judge. "When you finish with Old Jack, put out the light and lock the door."

Ezra Bobbett and his wife were sitting at a table in a room that served as kitchen and dining-room. Ezra was leaning an elbow on the table and his chin rested in his lifted hand.

His wife was knitting, and he watched the flying needles moodily. Both started nervously to their feet when the judge appeared.

"Ezra," remarked the judge, "I want to tell you a little story."

"That's what I heerd," mumbled Ezra, in quivering tones.

He pushed out a chair for the judge and waved Reeves to another. They were hardly seated before Lady Ann joined them. Ezra saw that the store was dark.

"Closin' up early, ain't you, Liddy?" he queried.

"Judge Brand told me to," said the girl, seating herself quietly.

Ezra shifted uneasily and Mrs. Bobbett put away her knitting. The very air was vibrant with the importance of disclosures to come.

Bobbett reached for his pipe, then put it down again. Lady Ann drew her chair closer to him, and rested an affectionate hand on his arm.

"Go—go on with your yarn, jedge," urged Bobbett, huskily.

"How old are you, Ezra?" inquired Brand.

"Seventy, jedge."

"This story takes us back thirty years, to the time when you were forty. It is a true story I am going to tell you, Bobbett, but I'll make it brief.

"Two men are camped on the Purgatoire River in Colorado. One of the men is an upstanding sort of chap, with yellow hair and blue eyes. He has slim, white hands, more given to handling the pasteboards than pick and shovel. The other man is of another grain, too good to be a capper for the blackleg, although that is exactly what he is.

"It is afternoon, and a stranger rides along the Purgatoire on horseback. There is a gold pan and grub pack at the stranger's cante, and he has a buckskin bag filled with dust from the placerings. The yellow-haired man asks the stranger to 'light and take potluck with him and his pard.

"The stranger accepts the invitation. After supper, in the light of the camp fire, the yellow-haired man suggests cards, and the three play on a blanket spread near the blaze. The—"

Ezra Bobbett, his face white under its tan, rose swayingly to his feet and leaned heavily across the table. His eyes were bulging from his head.

"For God's sake, stop!" he groaned. "Are you man or devil that you know these things?"

Ma Bobbett dropped her head and lifted her apron to her face. Lady Ann's wide, hazel eyes reflected sympathy for Bobbett and vague defiance of the judge.

"Sit down, Ezra," said Judge Brand calmly.

Bobbett, glaring vacantly, slipped slowly back into his chair. His knotted hands roved absently over the table-top and he waited breathlessly for the rest of the judge's story.

"That game of cards," proceeded Judge Brand, "was a little proceeding known as 'two pluck one.' The gambler and his partner had the stranger between them, and did about as they pleased with the cards. The stranger was known as 'Pecos Rufe,' in the easy-going way of the West in those old days.

"Steady, Bobbett! Just put the clamps

on your nerves until I am done. Pecos was quick to see how the cards were being manipulated, and he accused Gentleman Jim of being crooked. There was a row. Ezra Bobbett pulled a gun and, in the struggle, the gun was discharged. Pecos dropped. Bobbett and Rayner took his bag of dust and decamped. A grim little incident illustrating life in the Old West, you see, and—"

The judge talked in a friendly, conversational tone and not as one describing a tragedy. Reeves was deeply stirred, Lady Ann seemed scarcely to breathe, and Bobbett, with a despairing groan, dropped his head on his arms.

Mrs. Bobbett arose unsteadily and tottered to her husband.

"So you know of this!" she said chokingly. "You have dragged it out o' the past, after Ezra for years has been livin' a square life and doing as near right as he knows how! You are taking the part of Jim Rayner against him! You told me, Judge Brand," and her voice rose accusingly, "that you would lift the burden from his shoulders and make him twenty years younger. This is the way you do it!"

"Judge Brand," put in Lady Ann with flashing eyes, "Ezra Bobbett has always been good to me, and I could not think more of my own father than I do of him! I want you to give me some of my money so I can pay Jim Rayner what he asks. You're not going to make things harder for dad, are you?" she pleaded.

"Please wait until I finish," the judge requested. "Rayner made Bobbett believe that Pecos Rufe had been killed; and Rayner, I think, has been holding that over Bobbett ever since. Am I right?"

"Yes, you are," admitted Ma Bobbett, colorlessly.

"All this happened before you were born, Lady Ann," went on the judge, "and Bobbett, as you know him, is not the Bobbett who trailed along with Jim Rayner in the old days. I think Ezra Bobbett had a lesson, and that he profited by it. But Gentleman Jim was wrong. Look here, Bobbett."

The judge had opened his flannel shirt at the throat and pulled it back to reveal his bare shoulder. A reddish scar showed against the white flesh. All in the room stared at the scar dazedly.

"Hugh Adams was not far behind Pecos Rufe on that old Purgatoire trail," resumed

the judge, closing the shirt over the scar, "and he picked up his pardner, took him away and cared for him. Pecos Rufe got well—"

"Got well." The words burst from Bobbett in a gurgling cry and he leaped to his feet. "What're you tellin' me?"

"The truth," said the judge solemnly. "I was not long in recognizing you, Bobbett, although I seem to have faded out of your recollection. My name is Rufus Brand; and I was called 'Pecos' in the old times because I came from the Pecos country."

Bobbett was like a man stunned. He tried to speak, but his voice hung in his throat. Staggering to the judge, he bent down and peered at him wildly.

Ma Bobbett crept back to her chair and dropped into it. Her white, drawn face was lifted and her lips were moving voicelessly. Her husband swung around with a gasping cry.

"Mother! The brand o' Cain has been wiped from my brow! It's all been a mistake, do you hear? Rayner lied to me! Mother! I'm plumb squar' with the world!"

The old man gave vent to a laugh that was half a sob.

"It wasn't so! I didn't kill Pecos! All these years I've had to bear a load that wasn't mine—that wasn't anybody's!"

Muttering and mumbling he went back to his seat. Then his wife, lifting herself erect, turned a steady gaze full upon his face.

"Are you square with the world, Ezra Bobbett?" she demanded. "Jim Rayner has had his way with you, and you are not yet free of the curse he brought into your life."

Her lips twitched, and tears came to her eyes and rolled down her cheeks.

"Seems to me there's another mark you got to wipe away, Ezra, before you can call yourself square," she added.

Bobbett gripped his hands convulsively, and he flinched as from a blow.

"I've had all I can stand for to-night, Lucindy," he whimpered.

"To-morrow, then, you will go with me to Judge Brand?" Ma Bobbett went on.

"Yes, to-morrow. I—I—can't you see I'm all unstrung? Judge Brand was Pecos—and I never knowed! Liddy, you didn't know about this, but now you can *sabe* what's been hangin' over me."

Lady Ann went to him, put her soft arms about his neck, bent her own tear-wet cheek to his and whispered soothingly. Judge

Brand, rising quietly, beckoned to Reeves, and they both left the house by the kitchen door.

CHAPTER X.

THE SHOW-DOWN.

MARTIN REEVES felt like a man in a dream. Judge Brand had lifted a load of guilt from the conscience of old Bobbett; and he had done it with a simplicity and directness that put to shame all the cheap drama of the '49 Camp.

"I guess that fills the bill for Ezra Bobbett," remarked the judge. "We will now drop in at El Rio Rey while I hand Rayner an ultimatum."

The Tenderfoot roused himself.

"What are you going to do to Rayner, judge?" he asked.

"He has played a crooked game with the Bobbetts, and lost," was the answer. "His knowledge of the shooting of Pecos was the secret of his influence over Ezra. Gentleman Jim did not recognize me, either, so he worked away on his rascally plan to wrest fifty thousand dollars from the fortune coming to Lorena Adams. In the old times a scoundrel like Jim Rayner would have been the central figure in a necktie party, with six feet of rope and a short shrift; but in these humdrum days we must proceed differently."

"It's the strangest thing I ever heard of, judge, the way you were able to draw on your experience and pull Ezra Bobbett out of his troubles!" Reeves murmured.

"Strange?" the other returned. "The only strange thing about it, Reeves, is the coincidence that brought Bobbett and me together, after all these years, in the little that's left of Rattlesnake City. That odd play of destiny extends also to Rayner."

They were near the honkatonk, and the judge led the way through the front door.

Rayner, Quesada, Vince and Handy were playing cards. It was a dull evening at El Rio Rey and there was no one else about the place. Those at the table looked up as the newcomers entered.

"Howdy, judge?" called Billy Vince. "Reeves, old sport, how're you coming?"

There was no answer to this greeting. Judge Brand walked straight to Gentleman Jim. There he halted and turning to the Tenderfoot, said:

"Present me to this gentleman, Reeves."

"Rayner," remarked Reeves, "shake hands with Pecos Rufe, the man you knew on the Purgatoire."

Handy and Vince smiled uncertainly. No doubt they thought this one of the judge's little pleasantries. Quesada scowled and muttered under his breath.

Rayner, who had always seemed to Reeves so strong and youthful, shrank suddenly into advanced middle age. If startled or alarmed he did not show it, but his blue eyes dulled and his lips tightened.

He managed to smile and put out his hand.

"Pecos Rufe?" said he. "Well, that is a new one."

"No, an old one," observed the judge, overlooking the proffered hand. "I can show you the mark—here," and he touched his shoulder. "Pecos Rufe did not cash in during your game of two pluck one. I have duly informed Bobbett, Rayner." There was determination in his face and voice as he added: "You have twenty-four hours to get out of camp!"

"Ah," returned Gentleman Jim in velvet tones; "and if I do not get out in twenty-four hours?"

"Well," was the significant response, "there is a sheriff in Penyan. Good night, gentlemen," and the judge turned without further words and left the place.

"Do you think Rayner understands?" Reeves asked, on the way to the adobe.

"He understands that this is a show-down," the judge answered grimly, "and he will act accordingly."

Next morning, Reeves took his location notice, ascended the gully and went down into the pocket by the fissure, the ledge and the vine-masked path. The stone heap he found as the judge had piled it, but the stick in the top had given way to a two-by-four section of scantling with a square board nailed to its top.

On the board, secured by tacks, was a printed notice similar to the one Judge Brand had filled out for Reeves.

What did that mean? Somewhat perturbed, Reeves climbed up on the stones and gave the notice closer inspection. One Juan Rosario Rayner had filed on the claim!

Reeves was thunderstruck. Who was Juan Rosario Rayner? The last name suggested Gentleman Jim, and yet the man who was trying to steal the claim could not be the gambler.

Reeves knew little about the locating of mining claims, and he was proceeding entirely on instructions from the judge. He gathered that his right to the property was in hazard, but just how he could not understand.

In the circumstances, and rather by chance than otherwise, he did the right thing. Taking down the notice of Juan Rosario Rayner, he put up his own in its place. His idea was to hasten back to camp and show the Rayner placard to Brand.

Reeves, eager for a little exercise, had walked to the pocket. He wished now that he had secured a saddle horse for the trip, inasmuch as that would have enabled him to lose no time in getting back.

Nevertheless, he made good speed down the gully and along the gulch, and came breathless and excited to the adobe. He found the judge examining his large-calibered, short-barreled pocket pistols.

"Did you draw the loads in these guns, Reeves?" the judge inquired.

"I?" Reeves answered. "Certainly not!"

"Then they were tampered with during the night," went on Brand. "The deringers are useless, and I'll have to call on Robbins for ammunition. I'm all at sea about this," he added reflectively. "They hung from the wall, there, in the belt. The living-room window was open, and a man could have reached in and tampered with the weapons easily enough. But what was the reason? Who could have done it?"

"That wasn't the only unusual thing that has happened," said Reeves.

He explained about the Rayner notice, and showed the printed form to the judge. The latter adjusted his spectacles.

"Hm!" he muttered. "This is mighty interesting. Your claim has been jumped, Reeves."

"Jumped?"

"Stolen; but the thief can't make good until he files his location with the recorder in Penyan. Who did this? The name Rayner indicates Gentleman Jim, but he isn't 'Juan Rosario.' It would be well for you, I think, to get a horse and make a quick run to Penyan. Lucky thing you put up your own notice and took this one down. By George! Something seems to be doing in the old camp, all at once. We shall have to—"

Just at that moment the door was flung open, and Robbins and Castle burst into the room in great excitement.

"Judge," cried Robbins, "all our cartridges have been stolen from the marshal's office, and there isn't a gun in camp that holds a loaded shell!"

"It must have been done last night," added Castle.

"You see," pursued Robbins, "we have been careful to keep all the cartridges in our hands, so there wouldn't be any promiscuous shooting. Now the ammunition has vanished!"

"And that isn't all," continued Castle. "Lafe Smedders was tied up at the corral, last night, and all the horses and mules, and even the burro, were run off. There's not hide nor hair of them to be found this morning! What do you know about that?"

Judge Brand took a thoughtful turn up and down the room. Finally he paused.

"When I got off the Limited at Rocky Spur," said he, "I saw some old coaches and freight cars on a siding. They were festooned with printed banners carrying the words, 'Castle's '49 Camp.' I gathered from that," and here the judge smiled, "that you had hired a company of actors to put on a show here for my benefit. Developments since I reached Nugget Notch have convinced me that I am right in my surmise."

Robbins looked guilty.

"I did the best I could, judge," he answered, apologetically. "It was a large order you gave me, you know, and I—"

"That's all right, Amos," the other interrupted. "I have had a good deal of fun, and I am not kicking. Just tell me, short off, if this disappearance of the ammunition and the live stock is a stunt put on by Castle's players for my own particular enjoyment?"

"Heavens, no!" cried Castle. "Neither Robbins nor I knew a thing about it."

"Very well, then," said the judge briskly. "Who tied up Smedders? He must have seen the man, or men, whoever they were."

"Jim Rayner and Don Quesada," answered Robbins. "They're up to something."

"I never did have much confidence in Rayner," muttered Castle, "but he has always played the game fair, up to now. What do you suppose—"

The door, flung open by Castle and Robbins, had remained ajar. A tall form suddenly showed itself at the threshold, a form that leveled a brace of revolvers and covered the four in the adobe.

"You have brought on this show-down, Pecos," drawled the voice of Gentleman Jim, his blue eyes snapping, "and now you've got to see it through. Your ammunition is gone and your guns are useless, so if there is any shooting, it will be on our side.

"All but two of the horses have been run off, so we can't be followed. The don is in front, with our mounts, and behind each saddle is a pair of roomy saddlebags. Already we have dropped into the bags what little plunder we could get from Perdue and Middling, and we're on our way through the camp collecting tribute. All you have in ready cash, gentlemen! Never mind watches or articles of personal adornment. Come across!"

Through a window Don Quesada could be seen sitting one horse and holding another. He was armed, and held a revolver in readiness for use.

Silence fell over the four in the judge's living room, broken, at last, by Castle.

"What do you mean by this? Rayner, if this is a play—"

"It's the real thing, Castle," cut in Gentleman Jim. "If I can't grab off a good-sized stake one way, I'll do it another. Quesada and I have the only usable guns in camp; what's more, we'll shoot if we have to."

Putting one revolver under his arm, he removed his wide-brimmed hat and dropped it crown down on the floor.

"Drop your money into the hat," he added, "one at a time. You first, judge!"

For once the resourceful Brand seemed at a loss. Slowly he began removing his money from his pockets, advanced under a threatening muzzle and dropped a roll of yellowbacks and some gold pieces into the hat.

"Very pretty," he said, as he backed away; "a stick-up in old time style."

"I hope it gives you a thrill," chuckled Gentleman Jim. "Now, Castle!"

Castle came forward and flung some gold into the hat. Robbins followed suit.

"I feel like boring you, Reeves," proceeded the gambler, an ugly gleam in his eyes as the Tenderfoot stepped up to make his own contribution. "The slickest scheme a man ever had for pulling down a bunch of coin has been back-capped—and I think you were mainly responsible. You're a buttinsky all right.

"I hoped you would starve to death in

that hole in the hills, but I missed out in my calculations. I discovered that steep-walled basin a couple of days after we arrived here, and I saw its possibilities in your case. It was the way out that fooled me. When I went back there to look the ground over, I saw your fool notice stuck up on the rock-pile. The notice has been replaced with another, and that other will go on record. Get that? It's a bonanza ledge, and Juan Rosario Rayner will take it up."

"Who is Juan Rosario Rayner?" inquired the judge.

"My son, known to the Forty-Niners as Don Quesada. Some of the best blood of old Spain flows in Juan's veins. Possibly you are surprised?" And Rayner laughed.

"If Juan Rosario Rayner tries to hold that claim," said the judge calmly, "he will have a job on his hands. I'll get to him for this morning's work."

"Don't think that, either," returned Gentleman Jim. "You're a keen old sourdough, Judge, but here's once I caught you napping. I'm making this a real show-down, see? Is that all you've got, Reeves?"

"Yes," answered Reeves, as his last gold-piece jingled into the Stetson.

"Then back up! I ought to put a bit of lead into you as a souvenir, but I refrain. Where's the chink? Hello, there, Sing Lee!"

The Chinaman shuffled in from the kitchen. He halted with a gasp when he found a gun trained on him.

"Whatee want, huh?" he asked in a tremor.

"Dinero!"

"No gottee dinero."

"Oh, come! Where's that nice little grub-stake Robbins gave you? Put it in the hat, Sing, or this camp will be short one Chinaman."

Sing Lee groaned as he fished his gold out of the depths of his blouse and allowed it to trickle into the Stetson.

"You may have held out a little on me, gentlemen, but I am not disposed to be critical," continued Gentleman Jim. "I got next to you, judge, during Robbins's talk with Castle in Los Angeles. I overheard a little of that conversation, and I gathered that you were the Judge Brand who came West a year or so ago looking for the old times and a daughter of your old partner. What I did not pick up from Robbins and Castle I got from Adams himself. I happened to be in Moccasin, Utah, when

Adams cashed in. In fact, I was the only man with him, at the time."

The judge drew a long breath.

"So you knew about Lorena Adams from Hugh, himself," said he. "You are a bigger scoundrel than I thought, Rayner, for you stole that nugget chain from a man who could not help himself."

"You're clever," Rayner returned, "and you ought to consider yourself under obligations to me for giving you one of the best thrills you have had in the old camp. But I can't delay any longer—the don and I have a lot to do, this morning."

His voice hardened as he added: "Every man of you will stay right here until the don and I have left camp. One glimpse of either of you and we'll open the fireworks."

He picked up the heavily weighted hat, backed out of the room and closed the door behind him. Through the window, the judge and his friends could see him empty the hat in one of the saddlebags, climb to the back of his horse and ride away with Don Quesada.

Castle sank into a chair, his face as expressionless as paper.

"He'll clean out the camp," said Robbins heavily. "At the office he'll take every dollar in the chest! Merciful powers, what a play the villain is making!"

Reeves was looking out of the window.

"Vince and Pop Handy are lined up in front of the Rio Rey," he announced, "and Gentleman Jim is making them put their money in the saddlebags. They'll stop at the hotel next, and then they'll cross over to the Bazar!"

The Tenderfoot, thinking of Lady Ann, turned from the window and started resolutely for the door. The judge stepped in front of him.

"Where are you going, Reeves?" the judge demanded.

"To the Bazar," was the answer.

"Don't be a fool, Reeves!" begged Castle. "Rayner only wants an excuse to pot you."

"Sure," added the excited Robbins. "We don't want a killing! Be sensible, Reeves."

"I'll chance the shooting," said Reeves, white but resolute. "I'm not going to stand by and let Rayner do as he pleases at the Bobbetts'."

"Wait," interposed the judge sternly. "You've got more nerve than all the rest of the Forty-Niners put together, my boy. I've proved that to my own satisfaction.

We'll call this game of Gentleman Jim's as surely as we called that other scheme of his. But we can't make any headway at the Bazar. We've got to lay for the scoundrels at the point where the trail leaves the gulch."

"There are two trails out of the gulch," said Reeves, "the one to Rocky Spur and the other to Penyan."

"I don't think the thieves will take the Penyan trail—Rayner has had enough of that. To be on the safe side, though, Robbins and Castle will slip out of the house, crawl around the bend, pick up Middling and Perdue and take positions among the rocks. If Rayner and his son should go the Penyan road, you can discourage them by dropping boulders down the gulch wall."

"What are you planning to do, judge?" demanded Robbins anxiously.

"While Rayner and Quesada are busy at the hotel," was the resolute answer, "Reeves and I will go out of this adobe by the rear door, get down to the edge of the creek and make our way to the slope on the Rocky Spur road."

"And then?" asked Robbins nervously. "Uncle Rufus, if anything happened to you—"

"Whatever is going to happen will happen to Gentleman Jim," cut in the judge. "This is no time to say no to me, Amos."

He took down the riata from the wall.

"Keep tab on the hold-up men, Reeves. Tell me when they stop at the hotel."

"They're there now," Reeves announced. "Rayner has gone inside and the don is waiting with the horses."

"Then it's up to us to cut loose," said the fiery old judge. "Make for the Penyan road, Amos, you and Castle. You come with me, Reeves!"

In silence the four made their way into the kitchen, followed by the despairing Sing Lee.

CHAPTER XI.

AMBUSHED.

TO all appearances Judge Brand was delighted with the turn of events. A camp of so-called old-timers had been suddenly thrown into spasms by a real and very comprehensive hold-up.

The judge was as wiry and energetic as any man half his years, and he led the way along the creek's edge with all the wariness

of a redskin on the warpath. By keeping to the bushes there was not much difficulty in passing the camp unseen and reaching the place where the Rocky Spur trail climbed over the rim of the gulch.

The wagon track angled from base to crest in such a way that the slope was easy for a traveler's nerves. There was but one turn in the ascent, and this came half-way to the top.

Here the road bent sharply around the foot of a boulder as large as a house. Judge Brand led Reeves to the up-hill side of the mass of granite.

"Do you get the idea, Reeves?" the judge inquired.

"Not exactly," was the reply.

"Well, look. We watch around the boulder for the two to come up the trail. Very likely they will be riding stirrup to stirrup, but they will not be able to make much speed. I'll get up the side of the rock a few feet and make a drop throw with the rope, getting the noose over the man who is riding on the farther side. That will bring the riata down in front of the one who travels nearest the boulder.

"The instant the loop is in place I jump down and take a half-hitch around the trunk of that scrubby ironwood. As the slack is taken up both men ought to be unhorsed; then we'll make some quick moves and disarm them."

"If anything should go wrong—"

"Don't worry about that. We'll do our best to work through the program—and trust to luck. Rayner and his son have got to come this way. Even if they should attempt to go the Penyan road Robbins and the others will drive them back. But I am positive they won't take that route."

"They're going to Rocky Spur, I think," speculated Reeves. "That's the nearest railroad point, and, of course, they'll not lose much time getting out of the country."

"They've got all the time in the world, Reeves, with all our horses run off and no effective way to give pursuit. It's my opinion they'll make for Penyan, so the don can record the location notice."

"The don won't dare show himself and do anything with the mining claim!"

"Rayner thinks he can complicate the ownership so we'll have to buy off his son; at least, that's the way I size it up. He's wily, that gambler. And what a jolt he handed Nugget Notch this beautiful morning!"

The judge laughed softly.

"The excitement is worth all the inconvenience it is causing us," he added. "I hadn't dreamed of anything like this coming up."

"Raynor and the don must have been pretty busy during the night."

"Clever idea, that of corraling all the ammunition in the camp! But then, Reeves, a cunning head did the planning."

The judge threw out the rope, examined it critically and coiled it in slowly and carefully. He hummed contentedly under his breath as he worked.

Reeves, excited and apprehensive, withdrew to the edge of the boulder and watched the road below. The rippling waters of the creek gleamed in the sunlight, and the rugged gulch lay under his eyes in peaceful contrast with the criminal proceedings going forward in the camp.

Gentleman Jim and the don would make short work of Hungerford, Ah Sin, the Mexicanos, and any one else who happened to be at the hotel. Then they would cross to the Bazar.

Reeves tried to picture to himself what would happen when the gambler and his son gave their attention to the Bobbets. Would Ezra, remembering his wrongs at Gentleman Jim's hands, try to resist? Reeves hoped not—on Lady Ann's account.

The Tenderfoot was half inclined to find fault with himself for not keeping to his original plan of going to the Bazar and doing his best to protect her. It would have been a reckless move, no doubt, but it would have spared Reeves all that worry his ignorance of development was now causing him.

From the Bazar the robbers would move on Golshaw and the gold that still remained in Robbins's chest. After that, the *señorita* would receive their attention, and then—

Reeves broke off his reflections abruptly. In plain sight below was the mouth of a dug-out, and in front of the opening was Hot Tamala, chained to a paloverde, and dozing in the sun. Near the grizzly was Old Jack, the Ute.

"Judge!" called Reeves, stifling a laugh; "come here a minute."

Judge Brand approached and Reeves pointed to the Indian. The redskin had the judge's battered high hat pulled down to his ears, and was swaggering back and forth in front of the dug-out, the gold-headed cane in his hand.

The judge shook with mirth.

"There's pride for you," said he, "the sort of pride that goes before a fall. There are the road agents, Reeves, and they're not even going to spare old Jack."

Raynor and the don came galloping along the edge of the creek. The Ute stared at them as they pulled their horses to a stop. The two by the boulder were too far away to hear what was said, but the actions of the trio by the dug-out were sufficiently eloquent.

Overawed by a revolver, the Indian dug the precious gold pieces out of a pocket and sullenly handed them over to Rayner. The loot went into the bulging saddlebags, and old Jack shouted fierce maledictions and indulged in a war dance as the robbers rode off.

"Now it's up to us, Reeves," said the judge. "Remember what I have planned."

"Surely."

"Then keep down at the foot of the boulder and be ready to jump into the scrimmage and do your prettiest. I don't believe I have lost the knack of throwing a rope, and I'm ready to bet a thousand against a chink wash-ticket that I snag the off-side man first crack."

"It will have to be the first time or not at all, judge," Reeves reminded him.

"I understand that."

Judge Brand was perfectly cool. Coiled rope in hand, he climbed to a small foothold a yard up the side of the boulder; then, leaning back against the rock-surface behind him, he drew the wide noose away from the coils with his right hand.

"Keep your eyes skinned, Reeves," he directed, "and when the horses are within a dozen feet of me throw up a hand."

The Tenderfoot's heart was pounding and the breath hung in his throat. Never before had he been engaged in such grim business.

He and the judge, with only their bare hands and a riata, were waiting to waylay two armed and desperate men! And one of those men would welcome an excuse for getting a shot at Reeves!

A roaring as of the sea was in the Tenderfoot's ears. He was listening for a sound of hoofbeats in the trail, but he did not hear it. The riders came into range of his eyes without warning, spurring upward, their mounts at a rapid walk. Reeves lifted his right hand.

The judge, planted on his perch, got the

wide noose in motion. Around and around it whirled, while he watched for the horses' noses to show on the up-hill side of the big rock.

At last he saw them. As luck would have it, the don, who rode on the farther side, was a yard or more in advance of Gentleman Jim. Neither rider had a thought of lurking danger. Everything favored the judge and his rope-throwing.

With a soft whisper in the air the noose shot outward, downward. The hempen circle hovered an instant over the don's head, then fell below his shoulders and was jerked taut by a quick movement of the judge's hand. Then, emitting a wild yell, the judge flung himself to the foot of the ironwood and made his half-hitch around the knotted trunk.

The yell frightened the horses. The don's mount broke into a run, and the saddlebags flapped and jingled as the astounded don parted company with the saddle and was dragged sprawling into the trail.

The judge's plans failed in one important point, however. Gentleman Jim's horse, under a tight rein, began to rear, so that the rope that had snared the don was powerless to entangle the gambler.

Here was the Tenderfoot's big moment, and he rushed to take advantage of it.

An oath broke from Gentleman Jim's lips when he saw Reeves darting toward him. A revolver barked spitefully, but the plunging horse made accurate shooting impossible, and the bit of lead struck the boulder and glanced singing into space.

Another instant and Reeves had gripped the gambler by the knee and brought him heavily into the road.

"Hang to him, Reeves!" shouted the judge. "I'll be with you as soon as I take care of the don!"

The Tenderfoot had received a large order, but there could be no turning back; he had to make good or suffer the tragic consequences.

He closed with Gentleman Jim in a life and death grip, hanging hard and close so the guns might not be brought into play. The blue eyes of the gambler were like polished flint, and in them Reeves read his sentence—if that sentence could be carried out.

In the dust of the trail the two men rolled, following the course of least resistance, which was down-grade. Their whirling, dizzy gyrations carried them off the

road and dropped them a yard or more to the foot of a rocky shelf.

Reeves, underneath, struck on his back, and the shock almost unhinged his joints and set the breath churning between his teeth. Rayner had a momentary advantage, but his weapons had been torn from his hands and were no longer to figure in the fight.

"Something told me it would come to this!" hissed Gentleman Jim, his face twisting with fury. "It's worth the price just to settle with you!"

His fingers clamped about Reeves's throat and exerted a steady, strangling pressure. It flashed over the Tenderfoot that he must do something before his strength failed if he was to save himself.

Wheezing and gasping, he rallied every muscle for the attempt. Half-turning under the knee that pinioned his breast, he caused Rayner to lose his balance and fall sideways. The grip of the hands relaxed and Reeves wriggled clear.

Both he and the gambler regained their feet at the same moment. Rayner stooped quickly to gather up one of the revolvers and, then and there, a coppery face overshadowed by a battered top hat appeared behind him.

As the gambler straightened he was seized from the rear, hurled backward and the weapon wrenched from his hand.

"Ugh!" grunted Lightning-That-Strikes. "You want um Injun shoot, huh? You heap bad tinhorn. Mebbysso Jack plug you?"

Even then, confronted by a redskin who had been robbed, and whose heart thirsted for revenge, Rayner would not yield. He leaped recklessly at the Ute, stumbling on a stone and falling headlong just as the revolver exploded.

Gentleman Jim owed his life to that stumble, for the bullet fanned the air above his head and sent up a spurt of sand from the ground beyond. The Indian, vicious as a coiled rattlesnake, would have fired again had not the Tenderfoot grabbed his arm quickly.

"No, Jack," panted Reeves, "make a prisoner of him."

They thereupon fell upon Gentleman Jim and held him struggling on the ground, while a swarm of men from the camp dropped off the trail to the shelf.

"Let me at him!" roared Colonel Chet Hungerford valiantly. "I'd have wound up

his little ball of yarn at the hotel if he hadn't caught me unawares."

"I saw you, colonel," jeered Billy Vince, "and you fell all over yourself to give him the hotel cash."

"Turn him over, hands behind his back," said Lafe Smedders. "I got a rope here, and we'll get it on him. He put one on me, last night, an' I'm shore pinin' to play even."

Castle and Robbins helped, and the gambler's arms were quickly bound at his back.

"What happened at the Bazar?" asked Reeves; "does anybody know?"

"He cleaned out the Bazar," answered Golshaw, "same as he did Robbins's chest. Thunder, but he and the don were doing a land-office business for a while! I don't reckon they left a gold-piece on anybody in the camp. However, did you and the judge stop 'em, Reeves?"

"Nobody was hurt at the Bazar?" continued Reeves.

"Some scared, I allow, but not hurt."

"How did the judge make out with the don? I've been too busy with Rayner to pay much attention to the judge."

"I've got my man, Reeves," called the judge's voice from the trail, "and I was just about ready to help you when the Indian took a hand."

"Where are the horses?"

"They ran back toward camp," said Castle, "and Catamount Cal and Handy caught them."

Reeves, bruised and sore, climbed back into the trail. Ree Middling handed him his hat and brushed off his clothes.

Luck had been with Reeves and the judge; and the camp, looted and the loot recovered, might well rejoice.

CHAPTER XII.

PURE GOLD.

GENTLEMAN JIM and the don, bound with ropes, were removed to the Spread Eagle Hotel. A sorry appearance the two presented, with their bruises and their torn and dusty clothes.

The Spartan spirit of the gambler, however, kept him head and shoulders above his troubles. He had played a reckless game, and he had lost. It was not the first time. The ironical smile about his lips faded a little only when his eyes fell on Juan Rosario Rayner.

The Forty-Niners looked on the captured pair with varying emotions. Colonel Chet Hungerford was savagely for reprisal; he demanded two ropes, a tree and a party of determined men—which party, by gad, he would cheerfully lead.

Smedders allowed the colonel was a heap stronger in talk than he ever was in action, and that he wasn't really so mad in his feelings as he let on with his voice. Now Smedders had been tied up by the prisoners and robbed, and otherwise humiliated, but he wasn't so set on a hanging. Speaking personal, if Gentleman Jim and the don told them where to find the horses and the lost ammunition, he was for turning them loose.

Between these extremes as represented by Hungerford and Smedders, suggestions for punishment ran the gamut. While Gentleman Jim listened, he evidently evolved an idea.

"Robbins," he called out, "the judge and the rest of you have the whip-hand. I'm not asking a thing for myself, but the don here is entitled to your consideration. Give him another chance, and I'll tell about the horses and the ammunition, and recite a few facts on another matter that will be highly appreciated by Brand. You see, I got the don into this, and it seems as though I could settle the bill for the two of us. What do you say, Robbins? Judge, how does it appeal to you?"

Castle and Robbins, with occasional suggestions from the judge, were busy parceling out the recovered gold among the many claimants. The task called for tact and discretion.

Those persons with hazy notions as to the money in their pockets were making their requisitions large enough to cover any lapses of memory. As a result, the total amount recovered fell short of the demands by several hundred dollars.

Robbins knew exactly how much remained in his chest, and his first move was to make sure of that. The only bank notes in the collection belonged to the judge, so he was easily indemnified.

Old Jack's coins were identified by the tooth marks with which he had tested them, so there was no difficulty in settling with him. All the others got as near what was coming as seemed just and reasonable, and they had perforce to be satisfied.

"Now," said the judge, moving toward Rayner when the distribution was finished,

"what was the proposition that you made just now?"

The gambler repeated the proposal.

"All right," returned the judge promptly, "tell what you know, Rayner, and we'll release your son—but not for a day or two. Reeves must have a chance to reach Penyan and file on that claim."

"Let it go that way, then," agreed Gentleman Jim, with visible satisfaction. "The rest of the horses will be found a mile the other side of Middling's cabin, penned in a notch of the gulch wall—a sort of natural corral closed with two riatas."

"Go after them, Smedders," said Robbins to the cowboy, and the latter started at once.

"The ammunition," continued the gambler, "is in a canvas bag in the bushes just back of Golshaw's office."

"I'll look after *that*," declared the marshal, and hurriedly left the hotel.

"How did you and the don manage to secure the cartridges so easily?" asked the judge.

"They were kept in the room where Golshaw, Robbins and Castle sleep," was the answer, "and I went in by a window last night, while the three in the house were playing seven-up in Golshaw's office. Your guns troubled us most, judge. I hooked them out through an open window and drew the charges."

"Very clever," remarked Brand. "What else have you got to tell me?"

"Do you want that before everybody? It's about Lorena Adams."

"Jest a minute!"

Ezra Bobbett did the speaking. He came into the hotel office at that moment, with Mrs. Bobbett and Lady Ann. Every eye in the room turned inquiringly on Ezra.

"When it comes to talkin' about Loreeny Adams," proceeded Bobbett, "I reckon I got the first right to be heard. Some time ago, jedge, I made statements before all the Forty-Niners in the honkatonk; and it's only just and squar' that I should make some more statements so'st the whole camp can hear. Ain't that right?"

"You are the best judge as to whether it is right or not," said Brand.

"I stand to it," put in Ma Bobbett firmly, "that what Ezra has to say is to be said in public. It'll be hard on Liddy, because it's as much news to her as to anybody, but right is right. Go on, Ezra."

Bobbett was worried, but determined. It

was plain that his spirit shrank from the statement he was to make, but equally plain that his will was driving him relentlessly.

"I said," he continued, "that Liddy Ann ain't of my blood. That was right. I said further that she came into our hands when a child wearin' a certain nugget chain. Liddy took my word for that, and she believed it because I said it was a fact. Well, it was a lie. I never saw that nugget chain until Jim Rayner gave it to me the day of the *baile*."

Lady Ann threw a surprised glance at Bobbett, amazed to hear of such duplicity.

"I knew that the same as Ezra," put in Ma Bobbett, "but I let the lie pass—to my everlasting shame. I reckoned it would kill me, in the days that followed, but I had a duty to perform by Ezra. Had I told the truth about that chain, Jim Rayner swore he would send Ezra to prison. So I kept still," sighed Ma Bobbett, "and Liddy Ann and the judge were deceived."

Ezra moved over and put an arm about his wife. Side by side they stood, ready to suffer in the eyes of men if spiritually they might be redeemed.

"I lied again that night," Ezra proceeded, "when I told the judge that Liddy's real name was Adams. It wasn't Adams, but Weaver. Liddy was never in Moccasin, Utah, and no more was mother or me. Weaver was killed in New Mexico by an explosion of giant powder in the mines, and when he was dyin' he asked us to take Liddy. I loved her—ma and I both loved her—as our own; she knowed she didn't belong to us, but she hadn't an idea as to her right name."

Lady Ann, white and slender, stood against the wall of the office, staring with wide eyes at Ezra Bobbett.

"Leave her alone, Reeves," whispered the judge to the Tenderfoot, laying a restraining hand on his arm. "Here's the test—let's see how she takes it."

Reproach rose in the girl's face, reproach tinged with horror at the false position in which she had been placed. That look went to Ezra Bobbett's soul. Leaving his wife, he took a step toward Lady Ann and put out his hands appealingly.

"Girl," said he hoarsely, "you know the holt Jim Rayner had on me. It was his scheme. He knowed about Loreeny Adams, about Hugh Adams, about Judge Brand

lookin' for his old pardner's child in the West. When he says what ma and me are to do, and when he backs it up with a threat, how was I to go ag'inst him?"

"Jim Rayner wanted fifty thousand dollars of the money that was comin' to Loreeny Adams. If he could make the judge think you was the daughter of his old pardner, you'd come in for a big fortun'. And Gentleman Jim would get his commission by holdin' over me the shootin' o' Pecos, on the Purgatoire.

"Don't be lookin' at me like that, Liddy. I know I should 'a' told Rayner to do his worst, but—but I hadn't the nerve. Now I'm tryin' to set things right. You ain't no right to the money comin' to Loreeny Adams. I'm—I'm sorry, but that's the fact. But there's no cause for you to blush at bein' a Weaver. A whole man your father was, and could hold up his head with the best of 'em. Liddy, ain't you got a word to say to ma or me?"

The old man's voice trailed plaintively off into silence.

Lady Ann turned from him to look at the judge.

"I'll have to tell you, Lady Ann," said the judge, "that I knew all along there was underhand work in this. I did not say so before, as I wanted to find out who was responsible for the crookedness. Jim Rayner was in Moccasin, Utah, when my old partner, Adams, died there. He secured the nugget chain at that time. He knew of Judge Brand's search for Lorena Adams in the West, and he learned that Judge Brand was coming to the camp in Nugget Gulch. So he made his plans regarding you accordingly.

"There was just one thing Rayner did not know, however, and it was mighty important to the success of his work. He did not recognize Judge Brand as 'Pecos,' and he had not learned that Lorena Adams was found, that her property had been restored to her, and that she is now living, married and happy in Denver."

There was a quiver in Lady Ann's lips. Slowly she made her way to Ezra and Ma Bobbett, put an arm about each of them and drew their old, withered faces close to hers.

"Then I won't have to leave you, after all," said she; "we'll be together just as we have always been!"

"Reeves," murmured the judge, in the silence that followed, "you were right. She

is pure gold. I think you are to be congratulated."

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT THE READER WANTS TO KNOW.

WONDERFUL days followed for Nugget Notch. Martin Reeves filed on his claim, then sold a half interest in it to Judge Brand for a sum which the judge called "nominal," but which carried to Reeves the assurance that he had made his mark in the West.

Good fortune, however, came not alone to the Tenderfoot. Robbins and the Forty-Niners were marshaled by the judge and Reeves and led into the pocket as into a promised land. The bottom of the basin was staked out in claims, and those who had come to the Notch for an engagement of thirty days concluded to remain permanently.

Colonel Chet Hungerford purchased the hotel outright, and chose to run it while another worked his claim on shares. Cata-mount Cal and Smedders went into the stage business, putting on a regular service with brand new equipment between the Notch and Penyan.

Ezra and Ma Bobbett bought the store, and Ezra panned gold in the pocket while his wife and Lady Ann attended to the merchandizing—until a call of the heart carried Lady Ann into a domestic establishment of her own. And the señorita married Juan Rosario Rayner and went away with him to a happiness of work and dancing and vaudeville circuits.

Old Jack Lightning-that-Strikes had a claim with the rest, but lived in his dug-out, farmed out the placerings, and took solid comfort exhibiting Hot Tamale. Manuel and Polo, Ah Sin and Sing Lee grew tolerably rich, and every Forty-Niner prospered and blessed the day that brought Robbins to Los Angeles with a contract to revive the Old West amid the ruins of Rattlesnake City.

The judge had spoken of a stampede. It set in as soon as the inhabitants of Penyan heard of the "strike" in the ancient diggings.

Lode claims were filed on and more placerings located. The "boom" had hit Nugget Notch; and in its wake came brick buildings, electric lights, telephones, automobiles and all the claptrap of modern

progress. The judge's nostalgia was responsible for it all, and an affair of expensive folly proved itself rooted in wisdom.

In the rush and excitement attendant upon the discovery of gold near the old camp Gentleman Jim fared rather better than he deserved, perhaps. No one could take the time to bother with him, and he was finally allowed to make his way out of the country.

Lady Ann lost one fortune to gain another. In Nugget Notch Martin Reeves is looked upon as a personage. Lady Ann became Mrs. Reeves, and a parson who had come in with the stampede tied the knot. Lafe Smedders declared it was the biggest blowout that ever happened; and he put forth veiled hints that if there could be such goings on at a wedding of his own he was ready to jump off himself.

The Forty-Niners, prosperous as they had never hoped to be, chipped in liberally and sent Castle to Los Angeles to buy a silver service. It came in a chest, almost as big as the box Robbins had used for his double eagles, and Pop Handy was delegated to make the presentation speech.

"Marty," said Pop, after overcoming a brief timidity, "we have knowed you as a Tenderfoot, we have knowed you as one who went out with the jedge to put the kybosh on a pair of highwaymen who had cleaned out the camp, we have knowed you as discoverin' the yaller metal which has put the Notch really on the map and made us all rich an' contented, but all them things are two-spots compared to the big trump you have played this evenin' by takin' over Lady Ann.

"Not a thing you've done has made such a hit with us. We congratulate the man as has done us proud, and with our gold we have bought a silver outfit to be used in the house-keepin'. When you pick out the right spoon for the soup, with every dip in the dish we want you should remember your pards, the Forty-Niners; and when you rope the right fork for the pie, with every chunk you bite off we'd admire for you to recall the days when we made a little West for the jedge—and he come out of the East and trimmed us at mighty nigh ever'thing we staged for his pleasure an' profit. You was a prodigy of a Tenderfoot, son, and we all hope you an' the missus 'll live a thousand years and have a fambly as big as Castle's old '49 Camp!"

Pop Handy was submerged in a bedlam

of cheers. He wiped his face on a bandanna handkerchief and got off the chair on which he had been standing, glowing with pride and puffing with the effort.

Later, bride and groom were driven to Penyan to catch a train for California, where the honeymoon was to be spent. Horsemen rode with them, and prominent among the riders was little Perdue, noisy and genial. Blank cartridges were fired, and Reeves remarked to Lady Ann that all they needed for a Fourth of July celebration were two rockets and a pin-wheel.

Some of the gold hunters from Penyan stood in the street of Nugget Notch.

"What's the fracas?" one asked of Colonel Hungerford.

"Fracas, suh?" stormed the colonel. "I allow if you were heard to refer to this

event by that name you would be shot full of holes on the spot.

"No fracas, suh, no fracas, but a wedding. Our esteemed fellow townsman, Martin Reeves, has been joined in wedlock with the girl of his choice, a girl in a million, and as fair of face as she is beautiful in spirit. I refer to Lady Ann Bobbett, whose folks keep the Bazar across the street."

"Oh, he's the guy that helped the old judge rope the highwaymen," said another of the stamperders. "What was the judge here for?"

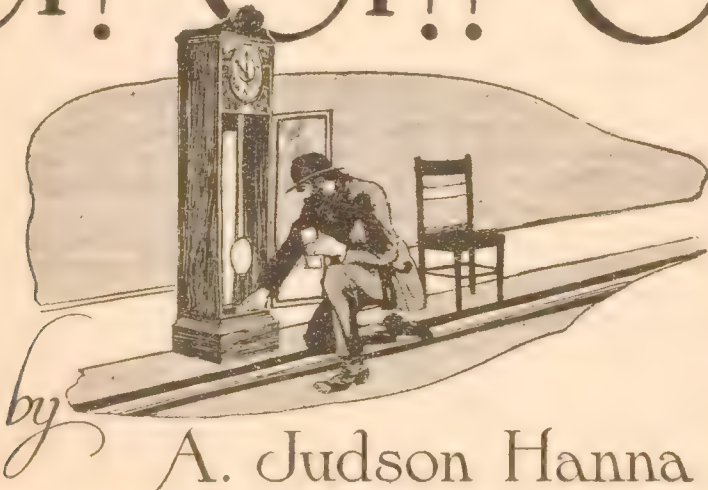
"To cure a case of nostalgia," answered Hungerford with dignity.

"What's that?" inquired the stranger.

The colonel didn't know; and he retired to the office of the hotel to make inquiries of Robbins.

THE END.

Oi! Oi!! Oi!!!



I MUST say some fellahs got it a nerve like a prize-fighter. I don't mean fellahs what make a living in a ring with their hands either, but fellahs what make a living with their *kopf*—the head—trimming their neighbors and friends.

There is that Asa Wolfinger now. I believe *positively* he makes more money trimming people than what he makes honest on his farm yet. If he don't lie awake nights and studying how he can make some money without working, why, I'm the champeen prewaricator.

The fellahs what I know are always watching Wolfinger to see who he will trim next, so when I went by the Red Heifer one day to talk insurance with Aaron Schlissler what runs the hotel, Aaron he says to me:

"Hi, Phares! Phares Himmel! What do you think that Wolfinger done now?"

"Search me," I says. "Did he sting another sucker?"

"Did he sting another sucker? Yah, he stung two of them this time for fair. Believe me, that Wolfinger is the limit posi-

tively. You know that thirty-dollar sick cow what he got last winter? Well, he got ninety dollars for it already. Now, what do you think of that, Phares?"

"Oi, oi, oi! Ninety dollars for that sick cow! How did he got it?"

"Just by studying how to do it, Phares. I must say that fellah's got it a head on him for thinking up tricks. You know the oil company run their new pipe-line through Wolfinger's farm. Well, when they come to his meadow, what has a little river running through it, they had to run the pipes under the bed of the river, understand."

"And that sick cow, Phares, believe me, she was all in, you betcha. Well, one day she is so weak she has to lie down by the river, and couldn't come home, by golly! This Wolfinger he goes down to see her, and he knows then he must shoot her, and lose the thirty dollars what he paid for her. While he is looking at the cow he sees where they put the oil-pipe under the river, and that begins him thinking."

"So next day he got his daughter Tillie to write to the oil people that their pipe is leaking, and when his valuable cow drinks some of the river it makes her so *krank* he must kill it. The oil people sent out a claim-agent. He looked at the cow and then at the river, and saw some oil on the water. The next day Wolfinger he got a fifty-dollar check for that cow what was sick already when he bought it."

"Some people!" I says.

"And then, Phares," Aaron, he says, "what do you think he done next? Why, he sent for the health-inspector and told him something wrong was with his cow. The inspector looked at the cow und says it has the tuberculosis, and he must kill it quick."

"When the cow was dead Wolfinger sent it a claim to the State of Pennsylvania for reimbursement what the State allows, understand, when they kill a cow what has tuberculosis. They paid him forty dollars for killing that cow. So now Wolfinger he got ninety dollars for a thirty-dollar cow what would die anyway. Yah, that fellah is the limit positively."

"Aaron," I says, "I betcha that trimmer Wolfinger put that oil on the river himself *schon*."

"Oi, oi, oi! I never did think of that," Aaron says. "I'll betcha that's just what he done. Well, Phares, I tell you I would

have no dealings by that fellah. If I should buy one egg off him, it would be rotten, understand."

Just then Hezekiah Hartmann, who was road-supervisor, came in and sat down by the wall.

"*Wie geht's*, Mr. Hartmann. *Schönes wetter*," I says. "Are you sick that you don't drink somethings? Have one on me."

"I don't care if I do," he says. "*Gesundheit!*"

"*Gesundheit is' besser wie krankheit*—health is better than sickness," I return to him.

"Aaron, have you seen that crook Wolfinger *dees morgen*?" Mr. Hartmann asked.

"Not yet," Aaron says, looking at the clock. "He'll be along pretty soon now."

Then he says, joking:

"Has he stung you, too, Hezekiah?"

"Yah; *oder* he thinks he has maybe. That fellah is a swindler."

"Now what has he done?" I asked.

"I'll tell you, Mr. Himmel. Last fall I bought some timberland off him what I want to make into cordwood *und* sell it to the brickyard. Now, that timberland lies up the hill the other side of his farm, *und* I would have to drive over his meadow, understand, to get out to the road. So when I made my bargain with him, I says:

"'Asa, when I get that wood cut I want to haul it out across your land. You make no objections?'

"'Objections? No,' he says. 'Why should I make objections? Haul all the wood you want, Hezekiah.'

"So I been cutting wood all winter, and now I'm ready to haul it out to the brickyard. And now, *wass kennst du*, Mr. Himmel? *Dees morgen* my hired man says he heard that Wolfinger was going to make me pay for going on his land!"

"What a scandal!" I says. "But how can he make you pay when he said he had no objections?"

"I have no written agreement, understand," he says. "I just saw my lawyer, and he says I gotta pay if Wolfinger says so. By golly, that fellah oughter be in jail! Here he lets me cut my wood all winter before he says he is going to charge me for hauling across his land."

"*Holds mahl*—keep quiet! Here he comes now," Aaron says.

Pretty soon the door opens and Wolfinger comes in.

"*Wie geht's*, Mr. Himmel," he says to me. "*Wie geht's*, Hezekiah. *Trink oop!*"

In a minute he sets his glass down and looks at Hartmann and says: "How soon you going to haul out that cordwood?"

"Next week," Hartmann tells him.

"Well, don't you think you oughter pay me first for hauling it across my land?"

"Asa, you told me I could do it for nothing."

"Excuse me, Mr. Hartmann, you got a mistake. I said I would make no objections, and I won't neither, only you gotta pay me so much by the load."

"Well, how much?" Hartmann asks, thinking maybe that Wolfinger would charge him ten *oder* five cents a load.

"One dollar a load," Wolfinger says.

"*Wass?* One dollar a load?" Hartmann yells. "*Du geht's weck*—go on, you! By Jersey, Wolfinger, I ain't no sucker, and you can't trim me like you trim everybody else. Where is my profit if I pay a dollar a load?"

"*All richt*, Mr. Hartmann. If you don't want to pay it, you don't got to, and that wood can stay there. *Es is' aus damit*—there's an end to it."

"Yah, it can stay there till it rots," says Hartmann.

"I think maybe you would change your mind, yes?" Wolfinger says, and goes out by the door.

"What a swindler he is!" says Hartmann. "I hope he gets trimmed good himself some time."

"What are you going to do now?" I asks.

"What can I do, Mr. Himmel? I gotta pay him what he says. It would take me and my hired man a month *positively* to cut a wagon-trail out to the mountain-road. No, sir, Mr. Himmel; I gotta haul that wood quick and start my spring plowing. If he had told me I must pay to cross his land before I would never have cut that wood. But it is too late now."

Wouldn't you think, now, that when a man trimmed another fellow once like that it would be plenty for him? But Wolfinger, he got a yellow conscience; so after he stung Hartmann fifty-six dollars for hauling that wood across his land, he sees another chance to sting him again. I must say that fellow is a slick crook.

Hartmann he advertised some A-1 seed-potatoes to sell, so Wolfinger drove over to look at them. He found Hartmann in the barnyard rubbing down his colt.

"*Wie geht's*, Hezekiah?" he says. "So you got it some seed-potatoes to sell. Let me see them. Maybe I would buy some."

"*Gewiss! Kommst du nach der haus*, Asa," Hartmann says.

When they come up out of the cellar after looking at the potatoes Wolfinger sees an old grandfather clock standing in the hallway.

"That looks like an old clock, Hezekiah," he says. "*Wie alt* is it?"

"*Ish weiss es nichts*—I don't know," Hartmann tells him. "But it is *nichts* goot. It won't run any more."

"So? What is the matter with it? Maybe I should look at it," Asa says.

"Look at it all you want to, Asa; but excuse me, that colt won't stand long without trying to roll down," and Hartmann went back to the barnyard.

Wolfinger got busy with the clock, because he likes to tinker *mit* machinery, and took it all to pieces before he found what was wrong with it. Then, when he was putting it together again, he found a kind of sliding panel in the floor of the clock.

He pulled it out and puts his fingers inside werry careful, thinking maybe it might be a mouse-nest. He found a long, flat package, and pulls it out to look at it. It was all done up in oiled silk and tied mit a leather shoestring.

"Oi, oi, oi! *Wass is'?*" he says to himself.

He opens it and sees a lot of paper money in treasury bills, as fresh almost as when they came from the mint. Wolfinger he can't read American, but he knows figures, you betcha, and he counts them in a hurry, and finds seven hundred and fourteen dollars in that bunch.

He hears Hartmann coming back, so he wraps up the money quick and puts it back again. Now Wolfinger is a crook, all right. He's got a yellow conscience. But he don't think it is right to steal that money exactly.

He thinks he is an honest man. Well, maybe he is. I ain't saying. He keeps inside the law, and maybe that is being honest, but I don't think so. Trimming people ain't being *positively* honest, and that's the way I feel about it.

He thinks it is all right to say nothing about that money what he found, and to buy that clock for himself. Then the money would be his absolutely, understand.

"Did you fix that clock?" Hartmann asks.

"Yah. Hear it go? Maybe now it would run for a hundred years again. Would you like to sell that clock, Hezekiah? My woman she likes to have this old furniture around the house. She's crazy for it, she is. Why, only last week she got it a chest of drawers with glass knobs what is more than a hunnerd years old."

Hartmann shook his head.

"I have had that clock for a long time, Asa. I don't like to sell it."

"I'll give you a goot price."

"How much?"

"Oh, twenty dollars."

Hartmann laughed.

"I wouldn't part from that clock for a cent under one hundred and one dollars. And even then I don't want to sell."

"One hundred and one dollars! Why, I seen it a clock like that go for forty-five already. And why is the price one hundred and one dollars? What for is the one?"

"It's one hundred and one dollars, Asa," Hartmann says, "because that's one dollar more than one hundred. And if you seen it as goot a clock as that for forty-five dollars, go buy it. Now come in the kitchen, Asa, and we would have some cider."

While they were drinking the cider, Wolfinger was thinking all the time about that seven hundred and fourteen dollars. But he hated like blazes to pay one hundred and one dollars for the clock. That would leave him only six hundred and thirteen dollars mit a clock he didn't want.

"I would give you fifty dollars for the clock," he said, "and only that much because my wife is foolish about grandfather clocks. I would like to please her."

"I know a relic-hunter what will give me eighty dollars any day for it," said Hartmann. "He said to me, 'When you want eighty dollars any time, you just bring me that clock.' But I don't want to sell it. Still, if that relic-hunter said one hundred and one, I would part from it."

Well, they argued back and forth for an hour, and all the time Wolfinger is afraid

that relic-hunter will offer one hundred and one and get the money hidden in the clock. Finally he gives up.

"All right, Hartmann," he says. "It ain't fair to trim me like that. But I will pay your price so my wife can have the clock. Will you take a promissory note?"

Hartmann says he will take the note, so Wolfinger writes it, and they get Hartmann's hired man for witness. Then they put the clock on the back of Wolfinger's buckboard.

When Wolfinger gets home he carries the clock into the house, and his wife says: "Oi, oi, oi, papa! What did you pay for that clock?"

"Never mind," he says. "Go away."

"You must be crazy to get a clock like that."

"I ain't so crazy what I look," Asa snaps. "Get me something to eat."

When his wife is gone away Wolfinger takes out the money and hides it in his pocket.

But then he got a worry to know how he was going to bank that money. A neighbor of his once found some money sewed in a mattress what he bought at a sale. It made a sensation, you betcha, and everybody was running around to auction sales buying old mattresses. If Wolfinger put that money in his own bank when his neighbors heard how he bought the old clock, they would think nacherly he found the money in it.

He decides to put it in a bank in Philadelphia. So next morning he goes down to Philadelphia to a bank on Chestnut Street, and hands the seven hundred and fourteen dollars to a teller and says:

"Open me an account, please."

The teller takes the bills and looks over them, and then looks up at Wolfinger funny like.

"Where did you get these?" he asks.

"Never mind where I got them, young man. Open me my account."

"But these bills are not United States money," says the teller.

"Not United States money!" Asa hollers. "Why, you must be crazy!"

"Maybe I am, but I am not so crazy as to take these bills for good money," the teller says, hot unter the collar. "I tell you these bills weren't issued by the United States government. They are Confederate money, put out by the government at Richmond, Werginia, during the war."

"Richmond! Well, this Richmond, Werginia, is in the United States, ain't it?"

"Of course; and if the Confederates had won the war this money maybe would be worth something to-day," the teller explains. "But as it is, it isn't worth anything."

Asa holds his head.

"Oi, oi, oi!" he moans. "It ain't worth nothing?"

"Hurry, please," says the teller. "Other people is waiting."

Wolfinger takes back the bills and goes out to the street, feeling werry sick in the head. He goes to a saloon and sits there for three hours, thinking how bad he burnt his fingers.

Hartmann has his note for a hundred and one dollars, and he has a clock which ain't no use to him. The seven hundred and fourteen dollars has gone up in the air, but maybe he can find a sucker to take that clock off him for something over what he paid for it.

After a while he goes home. When Ma Wolfinger sees him coming up the driveway, she opens the door and says: "Pa, there's a wisitor in the parlor what wants to see you."

"Who *ist*?" he grumbles.

"One of them relic-hunters," she tells him. "He wants to look at that grandfather clock. I hope you sell it to him. What a foolishness to buy it!"

"You betcha I sell it to him if he pays my price," Wolfinger says, and almost runs to the parlor.

"My name is Schwartz," the wisitor says. "I saw in the paper this morning that you bought a grandfather clock. I wondered if you would care to sell it again."

"Well, Mr. Schwartz, I don't know that I do," Asa lies. "It's a werry old clock, and I didn't buy it to sell. Come and look at it."

Schwartz looks all over the clock. Then he turns to Wolfinger smiling and says:

"How old did you say it is?"

"I didn't say, but maybe it is a hunderd und fifty years old."

Schwartz he laughs right out loud and says: "Look at this, Mr. Wolfinger," and points to some writing on the works.

"What does it say?" Wolfinger asks.

"I don't read it American."

"Why, it says, 'The Waterbury Time-piece Company!'"

And then:

"Look here again."

And Schwartz points to a little piece of printed paper pasted on the inside of the door.

"That says, 'Republic Furniture Company, Grand Rapids, Michigan.'"

"This ain't no genuine grandfather clock, Mr. Wolfinger," Schwartz goes on. "It's an imitation, with the works made in Connecticut and the case made in Michigan. It's worth, I should say, about forty dollars, and ain't worth nothing at all as an antique. Maybe it is twenty years old, and maybe only ten."

"But didn't you offer Mr. Hartmann eighty dollars for it?"

"No. I don't know Mr. Hartmann. Did he sell you this clock?"

But Wolfinger, he ain't answering. He sits down on the stairs and looks at the carpet like he was in a dream, wondering if Hartmann knew how young that clock was.

That night while he is at the Red Heifer, Hartmann comes in the bar. "*Wie geht's*, Asa?" he says. "Did you sold that Confederate money yet?"

"Confederate money? What do you mean, Mr. Hartmann?" Wolfinger says.

Hartmann he lets out a roar.

"What did you go to the city for to-day, Asa? You should learn to read American, Asa; then you would know when money was goot and when it was bad."

"You did me a wrong, Hartmann," Asa whines. "You misrepresented that clock."

"*Nein*. I told you I didn't know how old that clock was, and that it was *nichts* goot. It was you, Asa, who misrepresented the grandfather clock and the Confederate money."

"Anyway, you should give me back that note, Hartmann, and I will give you another for the value of the clock," Asa says.

"See here, Wolfinger," Hartmann snaps, "I paid forty-four dollars for that clock. You trimmed me from fifty-seven for teaming on your land. Forty-four and fifty-seven makes one hundred and one, just what you paid me. So we are square."

So I says to Aaron Schlissler one day:

"Is Wolfinger still looking for suckers, Aaron?"

"*Nein*," he says. "The trimmer got trimmed, Phares. I think he's had it enough of stinging his friends."

A Watchful Waiter



by John Blunt

WHEN a man sees his wife's face slapped by a ragged, half-drunken tramp, the sight is sufficient to make his blood boil.

It filled Jeff Miller, who saw the thing done, with murderous rage. His hand darted to his hip. He half withdrew his revolver from its holster. And then—he hesitated.

To drop in his tracks "the dirty greaser," who had dared lay violent hands on his Bess, would have been an easy matter for the Arizona ranchman, who was a crack shot.

But would that help her? This question, put to himself, stayed Miller's hand.

Slowly, reluctantly, he let the weapon slide back into its place. No, he couldn't shoot. That gang, three hundred strong, would get him if he did and butcher him. Then Bess and the kid would be left helpless in their hands.

The American stepped quickly back out of sight around the side of the hill. At last the thing he and his wife had been dreading for months had happened. A band of Villa's outlaws had crossed the Mexican frontier into United States territory.

Returning in the middle of the afternoon from the town, some miles away, he had found his homestead surrounded and his wife made a prisoner.

Jeff Miller's eyes darted to right and left, like a trapped animal's. He hadn't

fallen into the clutches of the murderous rabble—yet. He might have had he not heard the murmur of many voices and stolen on foot around the hill to investigate. Now he would return to the buckboard, whip up his horse, and hurry back to town for help.

But—while he was gone, what would the Mexicans be doing with Bess and the youngster?

Probably, after looting the ranch-house and setting fire to it, they would take the woman and the baby back with them across the frontier. It was unthinkable.

If only there was some way that he could get word to the town while he remained to watch the reckless mob and see the direction they took when they departed—

Jeff struck his fist softly in his palm. He had it! The horse, headed for the town, would find its way alone along the road toward it. It usually did that when he or his wife were in the buckboard. So well had it come to know the way that neither of them needed to use the reins to guide it.

Starting toward the wagon, Jeff pulled his memorandum-book from his vest-pocket, and with it the stub of a pencil. Tearing a blank sheet from the book, he scribbled on it an explanation of what had happened, with a request that help be sent out at once.

Then he fastened the note to the dash-

board of the empty vehicle, where it could not fail to be seen.

Turning the horse around, Jeff led the animal a hundred yards or so down the road that stretched straight away toward the settlement.

He struck the mare smartly on the flank with his open hand.

"G'long there, you Jenny!" he ordered under his breath. "You're goin' to town, understand?—and don't you stop for anything till you get there."

The horse moved away at a trot. Jeff pulled out his watch, looking up at the sun. There were three hours of daylight left. It would take the horse fully a third of that time to reach the town. It would be perhaps thirty minutes more, his message having been found and read, before the citizens would be assembled and ready to ride out to his place. And it would take them another hour to get there—two hours and a half, all told, must pass before he could expect help to arrive.

But, of course, all this presupposed that everything would turn out without a hitch—that the horse would hold to the pace all the way at which it had started off and not wander, driverless, from the road.

"It's a long-shot chance I'm takin', I know," Jeff muttered to himself. "But I can't go away and leave her and the kid alone with those devils!"

Going back on his tiptoes, Jeff removed his sombrero and once more stole a look around the side of the hill.

The ragged crew had by now completed their looting of the dwelling.

There was little of intrinsic worth the Millers owned to reward them. No money was there, or silverware—or valuables of any sort that could be converted into cash. The house had been dismantled, nevertheless, to judge from the tumbled pile of household goods on the ground outside it; probably in a search for such hidden treasures.

Jeff saw his wife standing a little apart from the tall, dark-skinned vagabond, evidently the leader of the gang, who had struck her across the face with his open hand.

She did not once look toward the hill around whose side Jeff was furtively watching. She was too clever for that.

A question, bringing with it an instant dryness to his mouth and a nervous clenching of his hands, rose in his mind as

he watched his wife standing apathetically there in the outlaws' midst:

Where was the baby?

She should have been holding it in her arms. They hung listlessly at her sides—empty. He knew there was no place in the house where she could have hidden the infant at the mob's coming. No place in which they would not have discovered it in their ransacking of the abode and brought it forth before this.

The ranchman opened his hands and clenched them again, the veins in his neck swelling with the mounting of the murderous wrath once more within him.

If they had harmed his little son—

But there it was again. What could he do to them, one against three hundred? He could drop their leader from where he stood, and perhaps five more of the band, with the bullets left in his gun. Then the remainder would overwhelm him, and so snuff out the one chance left for his wife and child—if it was still alive—to escape from their clutches.

He must stay where he was, and do nothing to betray his presence, so that he could follow the villainous rabble when they made off, and mark the direction they took.

He could leave a trail of scraps of paper torn from his memorandum-book, which the townsmen would follow until they caught up to the miscreants and captured or slew the lot.

But now, having sacked the dwelling, why didn't they set fire to it and depart?

Jeff saw the leader turn to give an order to two of the miscreants beside him. They seized the woman and dragged her to the hitching-post. Forcing her to sit down with her back against it, they bound her arms to the post.

Then two more of the swarthy crew emerged from the house. One of them bore a bowl of water. The other held a bag of salt. Jeff saw the latter kneel beside his wife, force her mouth open, and rub a handful of salt in it, laughing at her struggles to frustrate his purpose by twisting her head from side to side.

The other Mexican set down the bowl of water in front of her, an inch or so beyond her reach. And, with his companion, he stepped back.

"They're goin' to leave her behind to suffer the tortures of the damned with the thirst that salt will set up." Jeff voiced

his thought half aloud. "But you won't have to stand it long, old girl! I'll have those ropes off you and that water to your lips as soon as they've gone out of sight!"

Still the rascals made no move to take their departure. A half-hour passed. Then another. And yet they sat or lolled about on the ground. What were they waiting for, Jeff asked himself with feverish impatience?

Not to watch the effect of their devilish scheme of torture upon his wife, it was plain, for they paid scant heed to her as she sat tied to the post before the bowl of water.

Jeff, stiff from his long, motionless vigil, looked up again at the sun. It was beginning to sink over the edge of the western horizon.

And his straining ears could catch no sound of hoof-beats from the road behind him that would tell of the arrival of help from the settlement.

Suddenly, catching his breath, Jeff darted back a second time out of sight around the hill. The bandits were on the move at last. But, instead of heading in the direction whence they had come, they were advancing, bringing his wife with them, his way—toward the town.

Turning, Jeff ran swiftly back to seek some cover from which he could watch where they went.

The sun dropped from the heavens as the marauders passed his hiding-place. Jeff set off after them—his jaws tightened and his eyes narrowed to vengeful pin-points.

His baby—it had been killed by the gang. He knew that now. For he had not seen it with them.

"They must be goin' to make a night attack on the town," Jeff told himself through his clenched teeth. "Figgerin', I s'pose, that they can take the settlement by surprise, an' wipe out every man an' woman in it. Jenny never got there with the buckboard and the message I sent. The boys would have ridden back this far by now if she had. They don't know what's in store for 'em. An' I've got to warn 'em—by gettin' ahead of them butchers, some way, without them seein' or hearin' me an' beatin' 'em to the town!"

A range of hills ran along beside the road to the left. Among them Jeff would be out of sight of the Mexicans as he ran past them to come out on the road ahead.

He would be far enough away by that time to be hidden from their view in the night as he raced on to warn the townsmen of their coming.

Suddenly Jeff halted. He could plainly hear the voices and shuffling footfalls of the gang as they moved along the road on his left, which told him that he was abreast of them. And before him lay an open space, several hundred feet in length, between that hill and the one ahead of it.

He would be seen if he attempted to cross that clearing now. He would have to wait until the rabble had gone by.

From the shelter of the hillside he watched the mob straggle into view. And then—a strange thing happened. Without a moment's warning the ragged crowd scattered from the middle of the road. Dropping down into the cover of the sage-brush that dotted the plain to the right of the thoroughfare, every mother's son disappeared in the twinkling of an eye, leaving Jeff Miller's wife standing there alone.

Darting out from his covert, Jeff ran to her and caught her wrist, dragging her back with him into his place of concealment.

"Oh, Jeff!" she broke down, weeping against his shoulder. "The baby—they—they've—"

He held her close, his face grim.

"They killed it, did they?" he asked.

She nodded with streaming eyes.

"It cried," she explained. "And—and the leader said the squalling got on his nerves. He ordered one of the others to—"

She could not finish. Jeff held her to him tighter, awkwardly patting her shoulder, and then released her.

"What did they run for just now?" he inquired.

"I don't know," she answered dully.

"I didn't see or hear anything. You know what they're up to, don't you? An attack on the town. They've been talking about murdering everybody there—"

"Quick!" he broke in on her, seizing her hand again. "They're coming after us now. Of course they saw me jump out and grab you. An' we'll be the first ones they'll butcher, unless I can get into a ravine with you an' hold 'em off at the mouth of it with this gun—"

"But when it's empty," she asked—"what's to become of us then? They're three hundred to one—"

He stopped, flinging up his head in a listening attitude.

"What's that?" he whispered. "Do you hear it?"

A metallic rapping, followed by a whirring as of the wings of some gigantic bird in flight, fell upon their ears.

"I know what it is," Jeff cried out, "a United States aeroplane! Those fiends must have heard it, too, and that's what scared 'em. If I'm right, you're goin' to be saved, anyway—an' so's the town, too, if we can only get in touch with that birdman."

But fate was kind, and the army officer brought his machine to earth just then to make some slight repairs. Jeff and Mrs. Miller ran breathlessly up to him.

"There's a band of Villa's outlaws on their way to wipe out the town," Jeff blurted out. "Quick—take my wife aboard that air-ship with you, and fly there with her to give 'em the alarm. You can squeeze in one more with you. Quick, quick! Don't stop to ask questions, or none of us 'll leave here alive. The greasers are after us, my wife an' me, right now. Get aboard, Bess. Start 'er goin', officer—for yer life!"

"But, Jeff, what of you?"

Hastily kissing her, Jeff helped his wife into the seat beside the officer, who had already sprung aboard the aeroplane and had its steering wheel in his hands.

"Never mind about me!" answered Miller. "I can hold 'em off, I guess. Good-by, old girl!"

The body of Jeff Miller was found at daybreak by the United States troops.

With his empty revolver still clutched in his hand, he had been propped up against a mound of stones in the mouth of the ravine where he had tried to hold his slayers off, his back turned toward the town.

Pinned to the bosom of his shirt was a page torn from his memorandum-book. On it was scrawled in Spanish the warning:

"Remember, gringos!"

The captain of the troop gave the bugler the command to sound the advance—over the border.

And he voiced the thought that was in the minds of all who rode with him when he muttered:

"Yes, you dogs, we'll remember!"

HOUSEHOLD GODS

THE sofa and the big armchair
Were holding tête-à-tête
(Drawn up before a feeble fire
That flickered in the grate),
The family had gone to bed;
'Twas very, very late!

The sofa moved its weary springs
With reminiscent creak;
"Thank goodness! Jane's young man has braced
His courage up to speak!
He's tried to say 'I love you' now
For many and many a week!"

"My, yes!" the armchair yawned assent.
"I saw the symptoms, too—
Of late he's given me a rest
To sit next Jane on you!"
"They spoon for *hours*!" the sofa groaned—
"I need upholstering new!"

"These family love affairs have worn
Me out. Oh, such a bore!
This is the fifth I've chaperoned"—
(The chair began to snore.
The fire went out—the sofa dozed—
And silence reigned once more.)

Mazie V. Caruthers.



The Log=Book

By the Editor

LAST month I promised that I would open for discussion a topic that has no direct bearing on stories or their authors. It is a matter on which I should very much like to hear from my readers, scattered as they are all over this vast country. Is it true that there is planted in the breast of every American, be his or her lot cast on the plains of Kansas, among the mountains of the West, or in the glades of Florida, a deep-seated, insatiable longing to go to New York City? I am told there is. The preponderating number of non-natives in the population of my own home-town—for I was actually born in Manhattan—would seem to bear out the report.

THE LURE OF NEW YORK

But why, I am asking you? Why, for instance, should a young fellow I know have sold an expensive musical instrument he owned merely to get the money to pay his fare from Sacramento clear across the continent to New York, where he had no opening and few friends?

"If it was the excitement of a big city you wanted," I asked him, "why didn't you pick out Chicago, which was a good deal nearer?"

"But that wouldn't be New York," he answered, "the biggest town in the country."

I admit there is a reason why all red-blooded folk should be anxious to get at the heart of things; I grant you that in this big Empire City there are opportunities not only for pleasure but for culture that do not exist elsewhere, but what I want to find out from you is to what extent the desire to be in touch with Broadway should make people even on the Pacific coast willing to undergo all sorts of privations for the chance to win out in a city where naturally the handicap is greater than would be the case elsewhere with less competition.

There is no place on earth where one can be so lonely as in New York. The desolateness of being friendless in a crowd is appalling.

"Is it as hard to meet people in London as it is in New York?" a young fellow said to me just before the war, when it looked as though he might be sent by his firm to England.

No matter what my answer to him was. The point is that he had found New York a lonesome place. Do all you people elsewhere take this fact into account when you raise heaven and earth to make it possible for you to come to our big town?

Of course I'm proud of being a New Yorker, complimented to think that apparently everybody else wants to come here, but—well, I'd like to hear from you folks elsewhere at first hand on the matter.

The draw of New York on the rest of the country is far greater in proportion to inhabitants than is that of London or Paris, in normal times, on the rest of England and France. New York has within the past year passed London in population, and now ranks as the biggest city in the world, with 5,253,885 inhabitants, according to the latest computation, against London's 4,522,964. Paris comes third, Chicago fourth,

and Berlin fifth, with Tokyo showing up in sixth place. The next American city with a showing is Philadelphia, ranking ninth in what I may refer to as the world's series.

New York has been used as a background for stories so often that some years since I tabooed it. Readers grew weary of the same Broadway and Bowery atmosphere. Next month I am going to give you, in the book-length novel, a phase of New York life which I think will be new to most of you. The story is called

"A SECRET OF THE BRONX"

BY SEWARD W. HOPKINS

author of "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park," "Too Terrible for War," *et cetera*, and the scene is laid in that big and rapidly growing section of New York City north of the Harlem River.

Boardman Fanning comes to visit his erstwhile college chum, *Tom Kendry*. *Tom's* sister *Joyce* is, in the vernacular of the day, a "peach," but *Fanning* isn't the only one who thinks so. One *Batterson* also has his eye on the young lady, and, being endowed with much of this world's goods, including a yacht on the Sound, while *Fanning* is just starting out in the building business, the latter might well feel that all is up with his chances of winning the girl were it not for a strange warning that comes to him. Then things begin to happen thick and fast. *Tom Kendry* gets in trouble. His father mysteriously seems disinclined to help him out. Next grim tragedy stalks upon the scene, and the whole Bronx section is stirred up over the occurrence.

Don't miss this great story, published complete in thirty-three chapters in the July ARGOSY. You will find it full of human interest.

In the same issue will appear the first instalment of a new Three-Part Serial,

"THE STAR OF ADVENTURE"

BY PERLEY POORE SHEEHAN

This is a yarn of the purely romantic type. One might imagine the scene laid in the colorful mists of the past. On the contrary, the action starts in the late spring of 1914. You can't help liking *Charles Knowlton*. He is an altogether different sort of hero from any of those to whom you have been accustomed, but none the less agreeable company for that. The story begins with a fight and culminates in the biggest one the world has ever seen. I wonder if you can guess what it is? The tale is told in the pleasing style for which Mr. Sheehan is famed, and will, I am sure, rank high among our 1916 features.

Among next month's short stories will be a striking tale of the city by Frank Condon, called "Marianna Goes to Sleep," and "What the War Did for Anne," by Helen A. Holden, falls under the same heading as that used to describe one of the past season's successful dramas, "a story of yesterday, to-day, and to-morrow." "Shorty's Theory," by Mollie Frank Ellis, is a stirring adventure narrative of the West, athrill with quick action and capped with a unique climax, while "Hereditry Takes the Count," by Berton Braley, puts the small town on the griddle in great shape.

HASN'T MISSED AN ARGOSY IN 28 YEARS

A reader of THE ARGOSY for twenty-eight years is some record. I am proud to welcome Mr. Howarth among the Log-Book contributors. He will be glad to know that I was chatting with Katharine Eggleston only the other day about a new story for our magazine. She is the author of "The Taming of Fierce Elton," of which he seems to think so much. Oddly enough, he ap-

pears to have forgotten the name of the writer. At any rate, you will note he does not mention it in his list of big favorites, and yet he places that particular story at the top of his list. "The Man With the 44 Chest" was by E. J. Rath.

-Moylan, Pennsylvania.

Having read your Log-Book for some time, I feel that I am perfectly justified in writing my experience and conviction in regard to your wonderful and entertaining magazine. Twenty-eight

years ago, when I was just a small boy attending school, I read my first copy, when it was published weekly under the title of *The Golden Argosy*. I was so impressed then with the true worth and quality of the paper that I have never missed a number since.

As I am a lover of good fiction, I have read your book-length novels carefully and the continued stories as well, and I must say that of late years none of the authors appealed to me as much as Fred Jackson, H. Bedford-Jones, and Zane Grey. The best story of all to me was "The Taming of Fierce Elton." I was so taken with it that I afterward reread it. "The Man With the 44 Chest" was great, and "The Desert Crucible," by Zane Grey, was all that one could ask for. Am, indeed, sorry to hear of the retirement of Fred Jackson, but in all probability our loss is his gain, so we should not murmur.

J. OSCAR HOWARTH.

GREW UP WITH THE ARGOSY

Here is a letter from another long-time reader of *THE ARGOSY*. Mr. Munsey's story, "The Boy Broker," ran as a serial in 1887. The paper was a sixteen-page weekly at that time, selling for six cents a copy. Two years later the size of the page was reduced and a few more of them added, not anywhere near a hundred, together with a cover, and the price advanced to ten cents. Probably that is the period to which our Minneapolis friend refers. But no such values in magazine form were given in those days as the public now gets. No, "You'd Never Guess It," in the February issue, was never printed before.

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Mr. E. D. Park's letter (March Log) recalls the fact that I have been a reader off and on since the year 1887—more on than off. I have a recollection of "The Boy Broker," and I seem to remember *THE ARGOSY* when it was bound as a book in paper covers and with probably a hundred or more pages. *THE ARGOSY* of to-day is not *THE ARGOSY* of those days, probably for the reason that the impressions made on minds of a younger age are of a different caliber from those made on more mature ones. However, the adult *ARGOSY* equals the juvenile one, which is saying a good deal for it.

For curiosity's sake I would like to know whether you ever printed before the story called "You Will Never be Able to Guess," or some such name.

H. M. F.

A MAN WHO NOTES AUTHORS' NAMES

I have in the safe a serial by Louis Gorham, author of "Trembling Earth." Mr. Straight will find a timely story by John Blunt in this issue of *THE ARGOSY*. William H. Greene died some three years since.

Pleasant Point,
St. John, New Brunswick.

The April *ARGOSY* was fine, the complete novel in particular. I am glad to note the reappearance of Robert Keene, Edgar Franklin, and Howard Dwight Smiley on the contents-page. One of the

best stories I ever read was "Trembling Earth" in *THE ARGOSY* about three years ago. John Blunt and William H. Greene were fine writers. Are they still writing for magazines?

WALTER CLYDE STRAIGHT.

A SCRIBBLE THAT LANDS IN THE LOG

I have already explained why no more of Fred Jackson's stories appear. He dropped in to see me the other day, when I asked if he still preferred play-writing to turning out fiction for the magazines, and he said yes. So there you are.

Thompson, Iowa.

I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for some years, and can say that there is no magazine I like better. I liked such stories as "Mesquite Ranch" and "Taming Fierce Elton" first rate. Give us more of Fred Jackson's stories, also stories like "31754." I know you don't care a rip for this scribble, but I could not help but say what I thought of *THE ARGOSY*.

ARTHUR JOHNSON.

PRaise FOR THE UTICA STORY

Seward W. Hopkins signed his real name to his story, and he is Utica born. He made that slip about the Butterfield House, as he has not been in his native city for some time, being now a resident of the Bronx, New York, where he has laid the scene of his novel to appear next month.

New York City.

It has never been my pleasure to write you until now, and my reason is that I have just finished reading the most interesting story that has come to my notice in some time. It was interesting to me because it is a good story, and also because it is the first time that I have read fiction that had a setting well known to me.

I am referring to "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park." The story takes place in Utica, New York, which was formerly my home. The description and places spoken of by the author are correct in every detail save one. Why the author, who must have known Utica so well, should have erred in speaking of the Butterfield House in the same breath with the Hotel Utica, the park, and the boulevard surprised me, as the Butterfield was pulled down long before the other places were thought of. I could very easily realize how the fellow felt on returning to Utica from New York, and just how a stylishly dressed girl from New York is watched and criticised, as I remember the first time my wife and I went there after we were married. I would like to know the real name of the writer of this tale, as I really think he is a Utica man.

A FORMER UTICAN.

"BRA" MEANS FINE

You, who run through your *ARGOSY* at race-horse speed as soon as you get your copy from the news-stand, think how the reading of the magazine could be likened to digging for buried treasure when getting next to its contents meant the sort of work our Swedish friend tells us about

in the subjoined letter. I am very glad to give it a place in the Log-Book, and thoroughly appreciate the compliment the writer's determined efforts to master our stories implied. Mr. Lanz surely cannot complain over what the author does for *Ole Swensen* in "Solid Ivory" in this issue in spite of its title.

Rock Island, Illinois.

I have been a constant reader of *THE ARGOSY* since the same month I came to this country seven years ago. The first copy I came across I found on the farm where I worked. I did not know a word of English, but I had a Swedish-English dictionary, so I set to work and translated as I read. Believe me, it was some job. After the day's work was done I went to my room and read *THE ARGOSY* with the dictionary at my elbow. It took me two months to read that magazine, but I was richly rewarded for my trouble, for I never read any book in the Swedish language equal to *THE ARGOSY*.

I cannot see why people have to do so much kicking about the stories they don't like. They ought to know that they cannot expect all stories to be to their liking. I have read many stories which I did not like, but why kick? Some one else might like them. But you always find kickers wherever you go, people who cannot live without kicking; and if there is nothing to kick over, they kick anyhow. I think that "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park," which I just finished, is "bra," and I hope you will have more of the same kind; but watch the kickers advancing.

In some of your stories I see that where there is a Swede in it, he is always an ignorant, bull-headed scoundrel. The author must judge the Swedes by himself.

HERBERT LANZ.

THE SPRINGFIELD TALE SCORES A LONG-DISTANCE HIT

From far-off Central America a doctor sends these words of praise for the book-length novel of Springfield, Massachusetts, by George Foxhall, which was the feature of the February *ARGOSY*. Letters of this sort convince me that I am on the right track in demanding from my authors stories that reflect human nature. No matter, then, in what locality the scene happens to be laid, their work will ring the bell wherever it is read.

Galeras, Olancho,

Honduras, Central America.

Many thanks for "Why there was a Murder on Pearl Street," and to Mr. Foxhall thanks for *Peter and Peggy*. If you could keep this tale as a standard and size up other contributions by it, you would, indeed, stand high. I am sure no one can read this novel without being the better therefor, in spite of the blood-letting included therein. Would there were more *Peters* to meet a *Peggy*. More power to Mr. Foxhall's elbow.

WILLIAM C. ROBERTSON, M.D.

THE MOVIES NOT IN IT WITH THE ARGOSY

Who said the movies were hurting the magazines? A howl went up not long since that

motion pictures were going to put the speaking plays on the shelf. Yet the New York theaters have just had the most successful season they have enjoyed in many years. All of which is introductory to the second clause in the last sentence of Mrs. Haughawout's letter below.

San Francisco, California.

I have been reading *THE ARGOSY* for sixteen years. My husband was a dentist in Iowa. One day a dental-supply man came into the office and left me his *ARGOSY* that he had just finished. Nuff said. That was in 1900. I have never missed a single copy.

I have often wanted to write to the Log-Book, but lacked the nerve. When I get my *ARGOSY* I turn to the Log-Book *first*, then hunt the shortest stories. I just finished a short story in the April number, "Who Is Charles Avison?" by Edison Tesla Marshall. I sat on the edge of the seat while reading it. Would like to have long stories by same writer. I like stories of the improbable, desert islands, and stories of the Far East. I liked "The Brides of Sana." Robert Royhe (April Log) says: "Don't give us any more such tales as 'The Brides of Sana.'" He didn't like it, but I wonder if he ever thought other readers might. I have found stories in *THE ARGOSY* that I didn't care for, but I didn't get my hammer out. Somebody else that paid his dime might like them.

I didn't like "Claim No. 1," but not a knock. I thought it the poorest story ever published in *THE ARGOSY*. Yet I personally came in contact with people who thought it fine. *Hawkins* I never read at all. The *best story* I ever read in *ARGOSY* or anywhere else was "The Moon Maiden." I simply went dippy over that.

I am sorry that we have lost Fred Jackson. His "Winged Feet" was his best, I think. I think *THE ARGOSY* writers are all good, and I would give up a movie any time to buy *THE ARGOSY*.

ETTIE HAUGHAWOUT.

DOESN'T NOTICE WHO WRITES THE STORIES

Here's the first kick against serials since I have cut them down to three parts. Novelettes take the edge off the book-length, but I now and then give you, you will note, an extra long short story, such as "Twelve a Week Short," appearing this month.

Falco, Alabama.

I have been a reader of *THE ARGOSY* for about seven years, but have always bought it at the news-stores until now, when I have decided to subscribe. While I am writing I wish to register a light kick against the serials. Not against the stories, for they are good; but against the manner of publishing them. When I order a meal, I want it all at that time, and when I begin to read a story, I prefer it complete and not dissected. One book-length novel, a good novelette, and several short stories is my idea of a modern *ARGOSY*.

I notice quite a fuss about certain writers, and for the life of me I can't see why. It is seldom that I ever notice who has written a story. If it is in *THE ARGOSY* it is worth reading, so I pitch right in.

How long ought it take to read the average book-length novel? I read "Men in the Raw" in three hours and fifty minutes at one time, and I wasn't watching the clock either. That sure was a fine story (as are most ARGOSY stories), but I can't tell you who wrote it, and don't care. The story was all I wanted. I could name lots of stories that I liked, but I have already taken up too much space, I fear.

B. B. PADGETT.

ENOUGH FOR HIM IF IT'S IN THE ARGOSY

Herewith some more opinions on that matter of authors' names about which I chatted with you at some length last month. Thus far Mr. Straight, whose letter appears in another column, seems to be the only reader heard from who particularly notices who writes the stories.

Walkerville, Ontario.

I have been a reader of your ARGOSY for some time now, and always look up the Log-Book. I get lots of fun out of the various letters I read therein about one author or another. I don't think I could name one if I tried without looking up the book. I get my value out of the long complete story, never worrying who wrote it. If it is in THE ARGOSY that is enough for me. Only kick I have is the time it takes to get the next issue.

H. SCHOBY.

STRONG FOR "PEARL STREET" AND "ROSCOE CONKLING PARK"

Yet more praise for the February novel. I am still waiting to hear from Mr. Barnes on "Fools of Sacrifice." Meantime listen to our friend from the region in Pennsylvania where Mrs. Fiske's new play, "Erstwhile Susan," is laid.

Reading, Pennsylvania.

I have been getting THE ARGOSY but a few times, but I have already recognized its good qualities. I have no intentions to kick, except at some of the kickers, for instance Fred Barnes in the April Log-Book. If he and the rest of the members of his club do not like "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street," they do not know when they read a good story. I think all the stories are selected in good taste, especially the serials. "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park" is one of the best book-length novels I have ever read. "The Heir to Three Millions" is another good serial. In fact, I can hardly wait for the May issue.

P. H. WAGNER.

A CURE FOR LONESOMENESS

Mr. Schneider tells me that he saw THE ARGOSY on a news-stand, but does not mention what particular fact about it induced him to select it from among the others on display. I should be glad to have him write again and explain about this.

Long Island City, New York.

I am working in a real-estate office, tending to the switchboard, *et cetera*. Four hours out of every eight I had nothing to do, and therefore I

was very lonesome, so I decided to buy a magazine next morning. When I went to the news-stand I did not know what magazine to buy. I saw THE ARGOSY, so I bought one copy. I have never read it before. I read some of the stories, which were very interesting. I thank THE ARGOSY ever so much, for now I am never lonesome.

ADOLPH SCHNEIDER.

A WARNING TO AUTHORS

Watch out or the keen-eyed ARGOSY readers will get you. This is a warning to my authors. I rang up Mr. Sheehan about the break mentioned in the letter below, and he acknowledged the corn. Of course a completed picture oftentimes contains many more than a thousand feet of film. This must have been in his mind when he made the break noted by Mr. Bunnell. Of course, he knows better, being the author of the five-reel Equitable release, "The Dragon."

Redlands, California.

I am going to repeat the words of so many other ARGOSY readers, and say the magazine is a dandy. I like the short stories best of all, as I have never fancied long or drawn-out stories.

I am going to make a kick. Why do you not require the people who write ARGOSY stories to know what they are writing about? Some of them make such ludicrous blunders. For instance, in "The Smuggler's Daughter—Five Reels" in the April ARGOSY there appears on page 72 a phrase which reads something like this: "The camera was loaded with a thousand feet of film." Now, I am in the laboratory of a motion-picture concern, and I surely know that no camera will contain more than three hundred feet of film at one time, so you can see that this is a serious error. I wish you would ask the author about this, if you find time.

Hoping THE ARGOSY will live forever, I am, yours very truly,

WALTER W. BUNNELL.

LOG-BOOK JOTTINGS

A Selma, Alabama, correspondent thinks "A Mystery of Roscoe Conkling Park" excellent, but imagines there is a break in the cover picture which he thinks shows *Beverley Wayne* throwing the lighted lamp out of the window. But it is coming from behind her. Let him look at the picture again. He sides with Fred Barnes on "Why There Was a Murder on Pearl Street," so it appears to be a case of fifty-fifty so far as those who have written in are concerned. E. A. Tisdale, Flora, Illinois, says he is sure strong for THE ARGOSY, which he claims is the best magazine ever. George Johnson, Commonwealth, Wisconsin, reads a good many magazines, but declares that for clean and lively stories THE ARGOSY "has 'em all beat." J. T. Self, Woodson, Illinois, writes that of all the magazines he reads, THE ARGOSY tops them all, and that he has no kicks whatever to make. Arthur F. Brock, Kendrick, Oklahoma, always reads the Log-Book first. Although there are some stories that he doesn't like, he thinks THE ARGOSY the best story magazine published.

Have You Headache or Other Pain?

By Dr. E. L. Abogado

IF you were to take a place in a thronged thoroughfare and ask every person who passed what pain meant, you would undoubtedly receive as many different answers as the number of persons you asked.

One man's definition would be nothing more than a description of the agony he endured in stooping. One woman's answer would be simply a revelation of the fact that she suffered from severe headaches. Another man's explanation of pain would stamp him as a dyspeptic. Another woman's definition would tell you scarcely more than that she was a rheumatic.

And so on, until, in your quest for a definition of pain you had covered the entire category of human ailments.

Now then, if you asked each one what he or she did for the alleviation of pain, you would have a "remedy" for such pain as each individual was then suffering from. And if you were a physician, here is the thing that would strike you as the one incongruity of it all—the **preponderance of the cases in which the so-called "remedy" is not a remedy at all, but a cause of still more serious and painful conditions than those which it was expected to relieve.**

However, before we take up the consideration of the remedy which it is my purpose to treat of briefly here, let us for a moment inquire into the requisites of a true remedy.

It is obvious that any remedy that has to do with the alleviation of pain should confine itself primarily to the accomplishment of that one thing, such other benefits as might be derived from its use being incidental. In other words it should be a "pain specialist." In my opinion this would be the ideal remedy and you will, therefore understand what I have in mind when

I say that I have found such a remedy in a simple tablet put up under the name of anti-kamnia tablets. In the best sense of the word, anti-kamnia is a "pain specialist." These tablets are especially prepared with the one end in view of bringing sure and speedy relief from pain in whatever form pain exists. And I know from my own experience that they do it.

While, as I have stated, the primary purpose of the ideal pain remedy should be the alleviation of pain, it should not be lacking in other remedial benefits, because pain is frequently so closely allied with other pathological conditions that they are well nigh inseparable. For instance, the most prominent symptoms of most diseases are pain and fever. And while I do not wish to be understood as advocating anti-kamnia tablets as a "cure-all," I do most emphatically wish to call attention to the fact that they are equally as effective as fever reducers as they are as pain relievers.

I use them with most gratifying results in the treatment of all kinds of headaches, migraine, la grippe, and its after-effects; as a sedative in indigestion, gastralgia, dyspepsia, hysteria and insomnia; as an antipyretic in intermittent and malarial fevers, bronchitis, pleurisy, etc., and for the pains in acute and chronic neuralgias, toothache, sciatica, rheumatism and gout.

Perhaps I should mention here that no physician's consultation or prescription are a requisite for taking anti-kamnia tablets. They may be procured at the corner drug store in any quantity desired.

It may be surprising for those of us who are inclined to run to the doctor with our every pain and ache to know that such relief as anti-kamnia tablets afford, has been at our elbow all this time.

FIVE BIG WEEKS OF GREAT SERIALS

May 27 *"Captain Fly By Night"*
By Johnston McCulley

A dashing Don Juan of old Lower California in the days of the beautiful Ramona.

June 3 *"Box 991"*
By J. U. Giesy & J. B. Smith

Another adventure in the life of Semi Dual, the most celebrated occult detective in all fiction.

June 10 *"Trader Brayne's Daughter"*
By Vance Palmer

Just a smashing love story of the sea, in which two hearts and two souls reap all rewards.

June 17 *"The Return of the Mucker"*
Edgar Rice Burroughs

This is the sequel that the All-Story readers have been calling for. It is by the author of the Tarzan Tales.

June 24 *"The Fugitive Sleuth"*
By Hulbert Footner

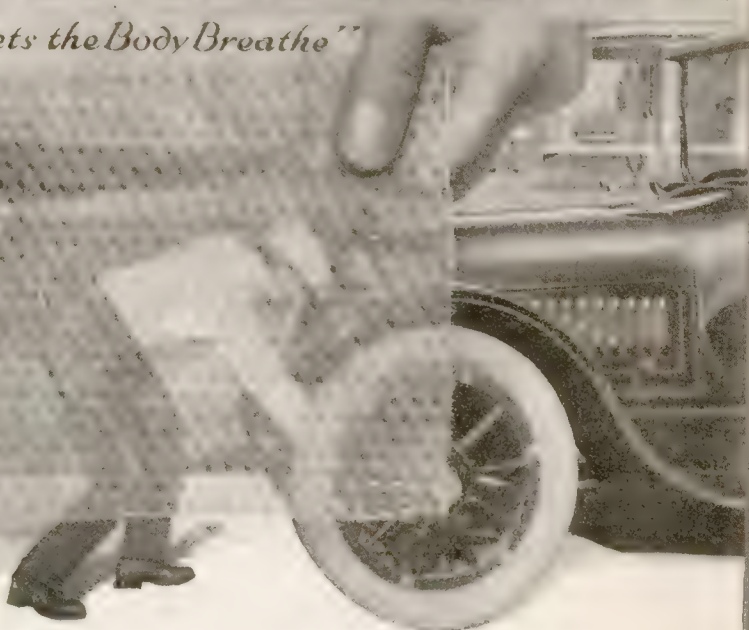
The author of "Jack Chanty," "The Sealed Valley" and "The Huntress" has written a masterpiece in this, his latest serial.

ALL-STORY WEEKLY TEN CENTS A COPY

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY
8 WEST FORTIETH STREET - - - NEW YORK

CHALMERS "Porosknit" UNDERWEAR

"Let's the Body Breathe"



And Yet—He's Cool!

Even when "jacking-up" his car. He wears Chalmers "Porosknit," you see. Jobs that are hot for others worry him *not*.

Chalmers "Porosknit" is so open you can see right through it—so open that it lets the body breathe—lets perspiration evaporate. The fine, soft fabric absorbs moisture, too. It is of such high quality that its durability is guaranteed *unconditionally*.

After you get a few loose-feeling suits of Chalmers "Porosknit" you'll enjoy real summer comfort and coolness.

With Chalmers "Porosknit" Union Suits there can be no "short-waisted" feeling. The Closed Crotch is elastic, therefore does not cut in the crotch.

Write for Handsome Book of All Styles

CHALMERS KNITTING CO.
Amsterdam, N. Y.

Chalmers "Porosknit" is comfortable, fits, stays put, cannot gape open nor bulge. The loose garment gives freely with every movement. Chalmers "Porosknit" does not—cannot—cling, sweaty and irksome, to the skin.

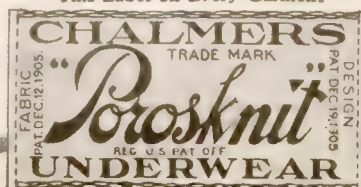
Be sure to remember that Chalmers "Porosknit" is unsuccessfully imitated. Demand the genuine—with label shown below.

*Also Makers of Chalmers
Spring Needle Ribbed Underwear
for Fall and Winter*

Ask Your Dealer

For Men	Any Style	For Boys
50c	Shirts and Drawers	25c
	per garment	
\$1.00	UNION SUITS	50c
	Any Style	

This Label on Every Garment



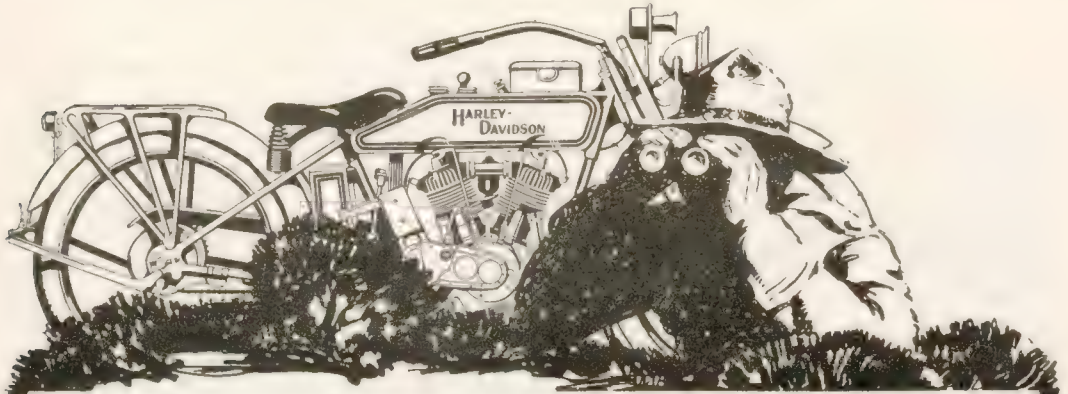


Take a
KODAK
with you.

EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY,

*Catalog free at your dealer's,
or by mail.*

ROCHESTER, N. Y., *The Kodak City.*



On Villa's Trail With Harley-Davidsons

WHEN the boys of the red, white and blue, crossed the Mexican border they were ready for business. Uncle Sam saw to that. One of the first things he did was to put motorcycles into service—and as Uncle Sam always provides his soldiers with the best of everything, he ordered Harley-Davidsons. Thirty-four of these machines are now in use in Mexican frontier service.

Whether for war, business or pleasure, the Harley-Davidson measures up to the demands made on it. It has power and speed—more than you care to use.

Let the Harley-Davidson make your travel dreams come true.

Have your local dealer show you the motorcycle the soldiers ride. He will probably make terms to suit your convenience. *Write for catalog.*

HARLEY-DAVIDSON MOTOR CO., 471 B Street, Milwaukee, Wis.

Boston Garter

Wool Grip

Silk 50c

List 25c

Everywhere

EXPERIENCE the satisfaction that comes from wearing the **Boston Garter**. It is scientifically made—handsomely finished—fits perfectly—is easily adjusted—stays fastened until released and holds the sock smooth without binding.

The "Boston" gives more service and more comfort for its cost than any other article you wear.

GEORGE FROST CO., MAKERS, BOSTON

PRIZE FISH

"There are better fish in the *lakes* than have ever been caught." Get into the game and land a big prize winner. Send us your fishing photos. We will send you **FREE** a splendid nickel-plated pocket fish scale, 15 pound capacity, if you send us your dealer's sales slip showing that you bought a "Bristol" Steel Fishing Rod between now and Sept. 1st, 1916. Full particulars, including catalogue, **FREE**.



37 lb. "Muskie" caught on a "Bristol" Rod by 13 year old son of E. T. LOVEDAY. Ottawa, Canada.

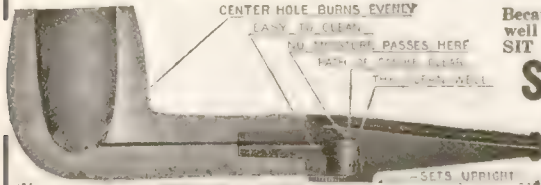
"Bristol"

The Prize Winning Rods

"Prize Winning" in the National Field and Stream Fishing Contest; "Prize Winning" in every lake, stream and bay in America; in every fishing club and local tournament; in every family and on every famous fishing trip. 19,000 dealers sell 38 different "Bristols", \$3.50 to \$25. Every "Bristol" guaranteed 3 years. Write for illustrated catalogue

THE HORTON MFG. CO.
45 Horton St., Bristol, Conn.

THE PIPE OF PEACE



Because it is no trouble to keep clean—it has removable moisture well that empties, can be put down anywhere—and IT WILL SIT UP! That's why we call it

SITTING BULL

It can't spill. The hot bowl itself does not rest upon anything. Mouth moisture can't get by the well and foul the bowl and smoke channel, which means A CLEAN, DRY AND FRAGRANT SMOKE. Moistened tobacco means immediate deterioration that changes its rich flavor. SITTING BULL will give you the richest smoke you have ever enjoyed. Don't blame the innocent tobacco any more.

SITTING BULL sturdy shape with bowl and smoke channel super built for a mouthpiece. 75 CENTS. Same with sterling silver band, \$1.00. Sent by parcel post anywhere in the world. Money back if not satisfactory.

Men, in Your Leisure Moments

success that they are now devoting their entire time to this work. It is the cleanest, highest grade way to earn extra money. WRITE AT ONCE asking for particulars. SITTING BULL CORPORATION, 607 W. 51st Street, New York City.

Diamonds \$250 On Credit 1 Month



Rock Bottom Prices Easy Credit Terms

Our import prices "direct from the mines to you" cut out all the wholesaler's and retailer's profits. You get the benefit of this saving along with our liberal credit terms—eight months to pay—and you wear the Diamond while paying for it. Our large catalog is free, write for it.

FREE Examination

You don't pay one cent until you see and examine any article you desire right in your own hands. If you like it pay for it on our easy credit plan. If not entirely satisfied return at our expense.

GET OUR GREAT 116 PAGE CATALOG. It contains over 2,000 beautiful illustrations of Diamonds, Watches, Solid Gold Jewelry, Silverware, Novelties, etc.—all the latest and most up-to-date designs at our importer's bargain prices—and easy terms of payment. Send for catalog today before you forget. IT IS FREE.

LOFTIS
BROS & CO. 1929
The National Credit Jewelers
Dept. A 847, 108 N. State St., Chicago, Ill.
Stores in: Chicago, Pittsburgh, St. Louis, Omaha



Delivered to You Free

A sample 1919 model "Ranger" bicycle, on approval and 30 DAYS TRIAL and free riding test.

Write at once for large illustrated catalog showing complete line of bicycles, tires and supplies, and the most marvelous offer ever made on a bicycle. You will be astonished at our low prices and reasonable terms.

RISE AGENTS Wanted—bicycles, make money taking orders for Bicycles, Tires and Supplies from our big catalog. Do Business direct with the leading bicycle house in America. Do not buy until you know what we can do for you. WRITE TO US.

MEAD CYCLE CO., DEPT. H-31, CHICAGO

3 1/3¢ a Day

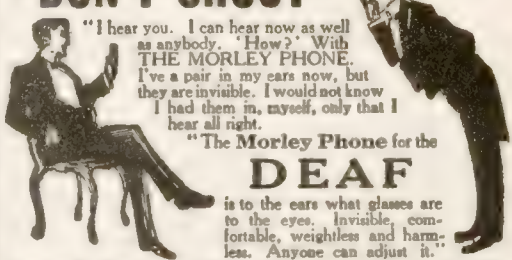
now has a dazzling Lachnite Gem. Their brilliance in eternal—they stand fire and acid tests and cut glass like diamonds. Cost but one thousandth as much. Set in solid gold. The newest diamond. Sold on Free Trial. See our new jewelry book.

Write for Big Jewelry Book address is enough. No obligations whatever. Write today—now.

HAROLD LACHMAN COMPANY
82 N. Michigan Avenue, Dept. A-107 Chicago, Ill.

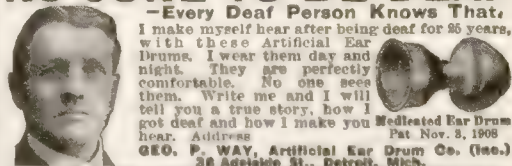


"DON'T SHOUT"



Over one hundred thousand sold. Write for booklet and testimonials. THE MORLEY CO., Dept. 752, Perry Bldg., Phila.

NO JOKE TO BE DEAF



\$1000 PER MAN PER COUNTY

Strange invention startles the world—agents amazed. Ten inexperienced men divide \$10,000. Korstad, a farmer, did \$2,200 in 14 days. Schleicher, a minister, \$195 first 12 hours. \$1,200 cold cash made, paid, banked by Boneman in 30 days; \$15,000 to date. A hot or cold running water bath equipment for any home at only \$6.50. Self-heating. No plumbing or water-works required. Investigate. Exclusive sale. Credit given. Send no money. Write letter or postal today.

ALLEN MFG. CO., 206 Allen Bldg., Toledo, Ohio



WOULD YOU

show this standard high grade 42 key fully visible typewriter to your friends and let them see wherein it excels any other \$100 typewriter, if by doing this and rendering other small assistance, you could easily have one to keep as your own? Then by post card or letter to us simply say, "Mail Particulars."

WOODSTOCK TYPEWRITER CO., Dept. E211, Chicago, Ill.

Earn \$3,000 to \$10,000 Annually

BECOME AN EXPERT

ACCOUNTANT

Unlimited opportunities—600,000 firms need experts. Only 2,000 Certified Public Accountants in U.S. We train you quickly by mail in spare time for C. P. A. License in less than six months. Knowledge of bookkeeping unnecessary, to begin we prepare you from ground up. Course personally supervised by Wm. A. Chase, LL.M., C. P. A., Ex-Secretary Illinois State Board of Examiners in Accountancy and large staff of experts. Low tuition fee—easy terms. Write now for free book of Accountancy facts.

LA SALLE EXTENSION UNIVERSITY, Dept. 635-H, Chicago, Ill.



KEEP THESE MEN!

"It Would Be Hard to Replace Them Because They Have Special Training"

WHEN your employer cuts down the pay roll it is the untrained men that go. His finger will sooner or later go down the pay-roll list on which your name appears. Are you one of the men whom he will hold? If you are not, I. C. S. training will keep you on the pay roll.

It makes no difference where you live, under what conditions you work, the I. C. S. will bring you in your spare time, at a small cost, the kind of training that the employer values—the training that will qualify you for a more congenial position—the training that means rapid advancement!

You can get this training. Mark and mail the coupon. You will learn how thousands, situated just as you are, have risen to positions of trust and responsibility through I. C. S. training.

Make your employer say "Keep that man" when he reaches your name.

Mark and Mail the Coupon TODAY

I. C. S., Box 2312, Scranton, Pa.

TEAR OUT HERE

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS

Box 2312, SCRANTON, PA.

Explain, without obligating me, how I can qualify for the position, or in the subject, before which I mark X.

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ ELECTRICAL ENGINEER | ☐ SALESMANSHIP |
| ☐ Electric Lighting | ☐ ADVERTISING MAN |
| ☐ Electric Car Running | ☐ Window Trimmer |
| ☐ Electric Wiring | ☐ Show Card Writer |
| ☐ Telegraph Expert | ☐ RAILROADER |
| ☐ MECHANICAL ENGINEER | ☐ ILLUSTRATOR |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ DESIGNER |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ BOOKKEEPER |
| ☐ Gas Engineer | ☐ Stenographer and Typist |
| ☐ CIVIL ENGINEER | ☐ Cert. Public Accountant |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Railway Accountant |
| ☐ MINE FOREMAN OR ENGINEER | ☐ Commercial Law |
| ☐ Metallurgist or Prospector | ☐ GOOD ENGLISH |
| ☐ STATIONARY ENGINEER | ☐ Teacher |
| ☐ Marine Engineer | ☐ Common School Subjects |
| ☐ ARCHITECT | ☐ CIVIL SERVICE |
| ☐ Contractor and Builder | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ Architectural Draftsman | ☐ AGRICULTURE |
| ☐ Concrete Builder | ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt. |
| ☐ Structural Engineer | ☐ Navigator |
| ☐ PLUMBING AND HEATING | ☐ Poultry Raising |
| ☐ Sheet Metal Worker | ☐ AUTOMOBILES |
| ☐ CHEMICAL ENGINEER | ☐ Auto Repairing |
| | ☐ Spanish |
| | ☐ German |
| | ☐ French |
| | ☐ Italian |

Name _____
 Occupation & Employer _____
 Street and No. _____
 City _____ State _____

Have Your Suit Made To Order and Take

6 MONTHS TO PAY.



Here it is—the biggest sensation in the history of high class tailoring! Think of getting a suit tailor made strictly according to your own individual measurements and having six whole months to pay for it! Yes, no matter who you are, where you live, or what you do, we will make you the finest, the richest, the snappiest suit you ever saw and give you an entire half year to pay for it! Don't miss this amazing opportunity.

Save Half

You actually and positively get the suit at about half of what it would ordinarily cost you! Our tremendous woolen buying gives us the pick of the world's greatest mills at lowest prices known. Therefore we can cut the price in half and still give you six months to pay. Don't buy cheap "ready made" and pay double our price. Don't pay other tailors two or three times as much as we charge.

Only \$2.50 Per Month

You wear the suit while paying for it. Payments so marvelously easy you won't miss the money. We trust you absolutely. Your word is all the security we ask. No reference, no red tape, no delay, no collectors. No strings attached to this credit whatever. It's yours to use as freely as you wish. Don't class us with ordinary tailoring houses. We are "different!" You'll be delighted.

Get This Free Sample Book

The most sumptuous style book ever published—our 1916 Spring and Summer Style Book! See the actual cloth samples of most beautiful weaves and patterns—the newest and latest. Also illustrations of choicest designs from world's greatest style centers. You'll marvel

\$1,000 REWARD

To anyone who proves that we do not make all garments to individual measurements of each customer. Beware of houses that try to palm off altered "ready made" claiming them to be made-to-order.

at this wonderful book.

Send Coupon

or postal or letter if you wish—but do it NOW! Get the magnificent free style book and full particulars of our startling offer. Don't delay! Write today.

Stanley Rogers Company,
 546 S. Clark St.,
 Chicago, Ill.

STANLEY ROGERS CO.,
 546 S. Clark St., Chicago, Ill.
 Please send me, FREE, your new DeLuxe Style Book and full particulars of your great offer.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____

BIG FREE BOOK OF SAMPLES

FREE BOOK COUPON

The Burlington SMASHES ALL WATCH PRICES



Look!

- ❑ 19 Ruby and Sapphire Jewels—
- ❑ Adjusted to the second—
- ❑ Adjusted to temperature—
- ❑ Adjusted to isochronism—
- ❑ 25-year gold strata case—
- ❑ Genuine Montgomery Railroad Dial—
- ❑ New Ideas in Thin Cases.

Only \$2.50 A Month

And all of this for \$2.50—only \$2.50 per month—a great reduction in watch prices—direct to you—positively the exact prices the wholesale dealer would have to pay. We do not care to quote these prices here, but write—write before you buy. Think of the high grade, guaranteed watch we offer here at such a remarkable price. Indeed, the days of exorbitant watch prices have passed.

See It First

You don't pay a cent to anybody until you see the watch. We won't let you buy a Burlington Watch without seeing it. Look at the splendid beauty of the watch itself. Thin model, handsomely shaped—aristocratic in every line. Then look at the works. There you see the pinnacle of watch making. You understand how this wonder timepiece is adjusted to the very second.

Every fighting vessel in the U. S. Navy has the Burlington Watch aboard. This includes every torpedo boat—every submarine as well as the big Dreadnaughts.

Burlington Watch Co.

19th Street and Marshall Blvd.
Dept. A-107 Chicago, Ill.

Please send me (without obligation and prepaid) your free book on watches with full explanation of your cash or \$2.50 a month offer on the Burlington Watch.

Send Your Name on This Free Coupon

Get the Burlington Watch Book by sending this coupon now. You will know a lot more about watch buying when you read it. You will be able to "steer clear" of the double-priced watches which are no better. Send the coupon today for the watch book and our offer.

Burlington Watch Co.

19th St. & Marshall Blvd., Dept. A-107 Chicago, Ill.

Name.....

Address.....



"PIPER" Is Always Above Par

Always a reliable, pleasing, satisfying, wholesome chew. Big brokers, financiers, operators in all lines which tax man's nervous energy to the limit, know this—they use "PIPER" constantly to give them poise and soothing, helpful comfort—and "PIPER" never fails them.

PIPER Heidsieck

CHEWING TOBACCO

The choicest, ripest leaves of the finest crops of white Burley tobacco are used in "PIPER"—and the juicy mellowness of this superb tobacco is enhanced by the wonderful, appetizing, "PIPER" taste. This famous flavor distinguishes "PIPER" from all other chews. Compare "PIPER" with any other tobacco you're now using and learn how much *more* enjoyment "PIPER" affords you.

5c and 10c cuts, foil-wrapped, in slide boxes. Also 10c cuts, foil-wrapped, in metal boxes. Sold everywhere

THE AMERICAN TOBACCO COMPANY

GO PREPARED FOR PREMO PICTURES



Get the full enjoyment out of your vacation with a

PREMO

Light, compact, easy to carry and to operate, and each camera suitably equipped and carefully tested to properly perform the work for which it is intended. Prices from 75c to over \$100.00.

Get the new Premo catalogue from the dealer, or write us. It's free.

Rochester Optical Division, Eastman Kodak Co., Rochester, N. Y.